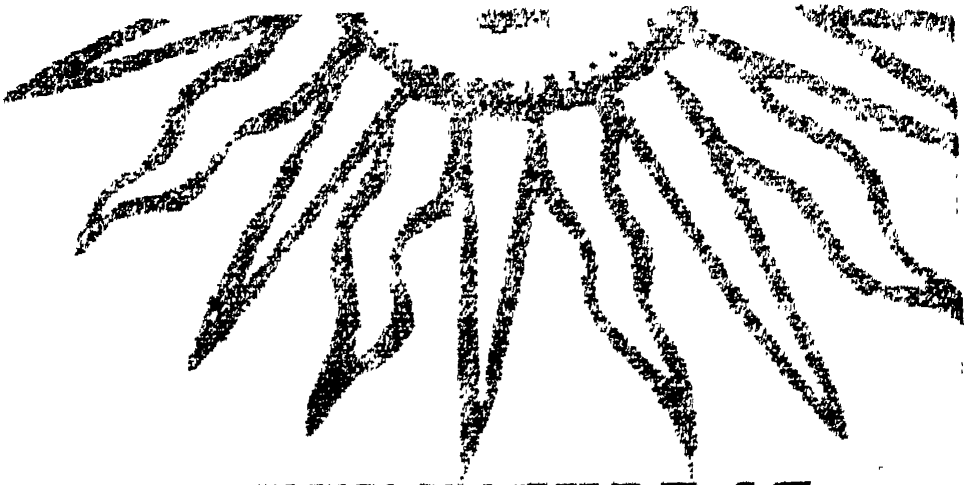
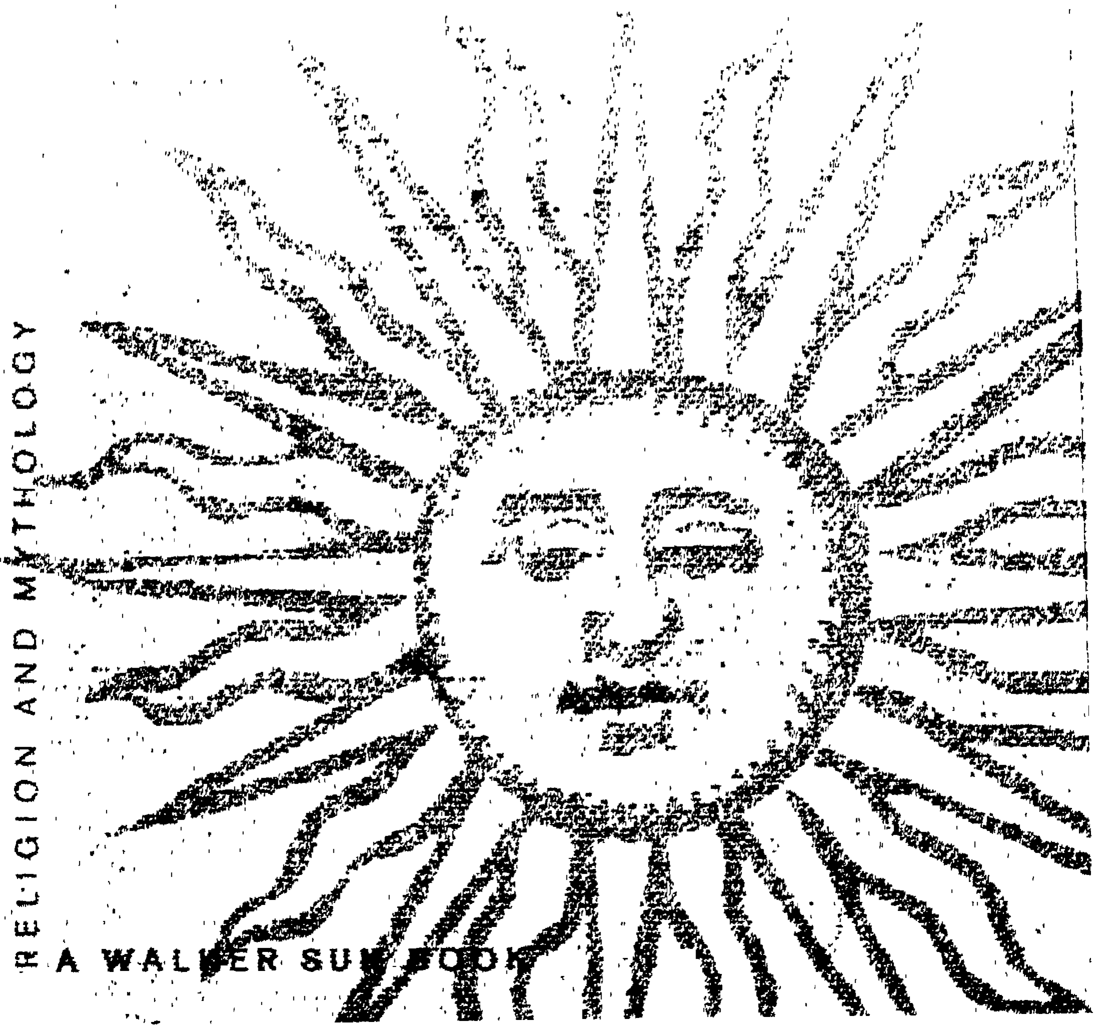


THE NATURE OF

HINDUISM

Louis Renou



RELIGION AND MYTHOLOGY

A WALKER SUN BOOK

The Nature of Hinduism

/ *by* LOUIS RENOU

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1 / THE VEDIC RELIGION

General

Vedism, or the religion of the Veda, is the oldest expression of the forms of religious life in India that has come down to us. The Vedic texts, which are the earliest Indian literary monuments (and among the earliest in the world), are also the earliest manifestation of the religion that is sometimes called Brahmanism and sometimes Hinduism. If we had to give a definition of the two words, "Brahmanism" would be applied to the religion of the earliest periods, becoming, in course of time, partly or wholly synonymous with "Vedism"; whereas the term "Hinduism" would apply to the whole main stream of Indian religious evolution, either since or including the Vedic period.

Vedism was the religion brought in by the Aryan invaders who poured down into northwest India (the Punjab, the region of the Upper Indus basin) between 2000 and 1500

B.C. Its fundamentals go back to elements identifiable as Indo-Iranian. They are those elements that, in Indo-Iranian religion, are at once antecedent to the reforms of Zoroaster and closely parallel to salient features of Vedic India; namely, on the one hand, a belief in certain basic ideas connected with a twofold hierarchy of deities (*devas* and *asuras*), and, on the other, the fire cult and the sacrificial use of animals and of *soma* (p. 14). But behind this Indo-Iranian religion, which was only a stage in development, there was something older still, Indo-European religion, which had already developed a complex network of beliefs about nature, ritual, and society. These beliefs can be grouped according to the functions they fulfilled: a specifically religious priestly and juridical function, another function representing the temporal power, and finally one relating to economic life.

But this dual inheritance, Indo-European and Indo-Iranian, played only a small part in the fashioning of Vedic religion. The old forms were modified by an accelerated inner growth and enriched by contact with indigenous elements; they absorbed part of what may be called primitive Hinduism, of which we know nothing except those traces of it that occur in Vedism. These become easier to interpret if we examine them in the light of observations gleaned from southern India, beyond the invaders' initial sphere of influence.

Texts

The only monuments of Vedic religion are texts. These are extremely varied, both in the nature of their inspiration and in their dates of composition. They form a very large and

important corpus, despite the fact that according to tradition they represent only a fragment of what once existed. This literature has been handed down to us in the shape of a number of schools of thought, known traditionally as "branches." Originally there were four of these divisions, corresponding to the fourfold function of the priests officiating at religious ceremonies, but they were subsequently divided into further "branches," corresponding to the developments in doctrine that took place as Vedism proliferated, spreading eventually to every part of India. It must be emphasized that we are far from knowing what Vedism was in its entirety. Our records of the original and secondary branches are deficient: we do not possess all the texts of any one branch, and such texts as we do possess are imperfect.

The most important and also the oldest of these texts are the four "collections" (*Samhita*) known as the four Vedas. The word *veda*, which means "knowledge," is also used in a wider sense to cover the whole or any part of the subsequent literature based on one or another of the four Samhitas.

These four are:

(1) The Rig-Veda, or "Veda of the stanzas," the oldest document in all the literature of India. The Rig-Veda is a collection of about a thousand hymns to the deities, a kind of anthology made up of compositions preserved by ancient priestly families. Most of these hymns are connected more or less directly with the *soma* sacrifice, but there are also a few having little or no connection with it.

(2) The Yajur-Veda, the "Veda of liturgical formulae," which has come down to us in several versions. In some of them the formulae are accompanied by a brief commentary in prose;

these versions are known as the Black Yajur-Veda. The others, which give only the formulae, are known as the White Yajur-Veda.

(3) The Sama-Veda, or "Veda of the melodies." This is a collection of stanzas, like the Rig-Veda, from which indeed almost all the stanzas are taken; but, being intended for chanting, it is arranged in such a way as to facilitate musical setting.

(4) The Atharva-Veda, which again somewhat resembles the Rig-Veda but the character of which is partly philosophical and partly magical. It is traditional to speak of the "Three Vedas" or "the threefold knowledge," taking it more or less for granted that the Atharva-Veda falls below the lofty dignity of the "Three" Vedas.

Later than the Vedas are the Brahmanas, or "Interpretations concerning *brahman*": prose commentaries expounding either the rites or the verbal formulae that accompany them. Some of the Brahmanas are specifically attached to one or another of the Vedas, or there may be two or even more referring to the collection as a whole, excluding the Atharva-Veda.

These two first groups in Vedic literature form what is known as the *Shruti*, or "revelation"; they are regarded as being of divine origin and as having been communicated to certain privileged human seers. The *Shruti* also includes some shorter texts that are the natural complement to the Brahmanas: the Aranyakas, or "Forest Books," suitable for recitation in remote and solitary surroundings; and the Upanishads, or "Approaches," which are profoundly and vividly philosophical.

The remaining documents of Vedism belong to the *Smriti,*

or "memorized tradition." The most important of them are the Sutras, or "aphorisms," highly condensed in style and intended to be learned by heart by aspirants to the priesthood. They were compiled in great numbers by the various "branches." Some deal with the celebration of priestly rites, others with ritual in the home, and there are yet others that set out teachings of a more general, less specialized nature, and draw the first outlines of civil and penal law, emerging gradually from the mass of ordinances enunciated by the priests.

Finally, the literature comprises a number of texts written in some cases as aphorisms and in others as ordinary prose, but later in verse. These add the finishing touches to the knowledge required by an accomplished ritualist; among them are treatises on meter, phonetics, and astronomy, and a variety of lists, methodical tabulations of knowledge of various kinds, and so on.

All the literature is in Sanskrit, an archaic Sanskrit showing a number of features destined later to become obsolete. The Hymns and "formulae" (*mantras*) bear a more pronouncedly archaic character than the prose, which came after them. Nevertheless the internal chronology of the literature is for the most part difficult to establish. Nor is the absolute chronology at all certain. The compilation of the Rig-Veda can be dated, hypothetically, about the tenth or twelfth century B.C.; the last Vedic texts, namely the Brahmanas and the major Upanishads, probably go back to the fifth or sixth century. But the evolution of all these texts begins much earlier, and there are, on the other hand, isolated Vedic texts that were composed later. The texts were handed down, and even

composed, orally—writing being used only secondarily—and even today reciters are to be found all over India who by speech alone preserve huge portions of the Veda with surprising accuracy.

Beliefs: Mythology

Vedic religion consists first and foremost of an elaborate mythology. The gods of Vedism, who are described mainly in the Rig-Veda, are active beings who intervene freely in human affairs. Suitably invoked, and placated by hand offerings, they are favorable; but otherwise they are dangerous and, of their very nature, ambivalent. They are usually stated to be thirty-three in number, and from the earliest times we find them divided into terrestrial gods, gods of "the space between" (the atmosphere), and celestial gods. A more pertinent division would be one based on the functions that they typify or encourage; there are ruler-gods, warrior-gods, and patrons of economic life (agriculture, stock raising, trades and crafts). But this classification does no more than touch the fringe of the facts. In practice, each god had a number of powers attributed to him, and this diversity was multiplied by the liturgical formulae and the demands of panegyric; the worshipers endowed whichever god whose praises they happened to be celebrating with some or all of the functions belonging to the other gods, so that Vedic mythology became a confusion that seems at first sight to defy analysis.

In the background of the pantheon dwells Dyaush Pitar, the Celestial or Heavenly Father, corresponding to the Roman Jupiter. He is a colorless figure, however, as are also (though they are frequently invoked) the Earth Goddess and the

nuptial pair of Sky and Earth. Closer, but still in the background, is Varuna, a sovereign-god, the upholder of cosmic and moral law, who spies out evildoers and binds them with his cords; he has a dangerous and almost sinister side to him. With him is often associated another sovereign, Mitra, the god of contracts and judicial majesty. Varuna and Mitra are the leading figures among the Adityas, a group of seven or eight beings descended from Aditi, a somewhat indistinct mother-goddess figure.

The most prominent part is played by Indra, whose wonderful exploits are repeatedly described. We are told how, with princes as his allies, he killed hosts of human or demonic enemies. On the plane of nature, he slew with a thunderbolt the dragon who had held back the waters, conquered the sun, set free the captive dawns, and so on. The origin of Indra, whom some have regarded as the typical "Aryan" god, remains doubtful.

Among his allies are the Maruts, a troop of young men who ride on the clouds and make storms and rain. Another name for them is the Rudras, or sons of Rudra. This brings us to one of the strangest of the Vedic figures: Rudra, essentially a fear-inspiring god, even (and indeed especially) when he is called *shiva*, "the beneficent," though it is true that he is a healer. The invocations addressed to him have a special character, which results from this dual nature. Two other figures who usually make their appearance as allies of Indra are the pair of Ashvins or Nasatyas, who ride through the sky in their chariot and whose passing marks the advent of dawn and dusk; they correspond to the Dioscuri of Greek mythology.

We do not know for certain whether the moon was ever

the object of direct worship. But solar symbols, such as Surya the Sun and Savitar the Inciter, play a very large role. Another solar figure is Vishnu, who traverses the universe in three strides. The Dawn is deified in simple, transparent fashion as the graceful goddess Ushas. The Wind appears as Vayu; Storm, as Parjanya.

Another group of beings, without being radically different from the foregoing, has its origins in concrete objects, visible things close to man. Such are Soma, personifying the drink of the same name; and Agni, who is in the first place the fire lit by men, hence the "fire" of the sun and the clouds and the vital heat or principle in forests, plants, and water. Agni and Soma are as it were inordinate figures who have exceeded their original boundaries, and to whom a multitude of ideas have been assimilated.

In a secondary position we find Pushan, the god who guides men and animals on their way; Brihaspati, the "master of *mantras*"; and Tvashtar and the three Ridhus, who are gods of crafts.

Generally speaking, the demarcation of the various divine functions is not at all strict. Moreover, individual figures are often hard to distinguish from names of objects or plants that have been promoted, more or less permanently, to divine status. On the other hand, there are hardly any feminine figures; the concept of a divine bride never obtained a footing. Demons abound, mingled with memories of human enemies, but there is no central demoniacal figure; the most important demon, Vritra, the enemy of Indra, personifies "resistance." Anonymous groups and pairs occur frequently. The Asuras, who begin by being sovereign-gods,

start moving, from the time of the later additions to the Rig-Veda onward, toward the demoniacal level, as the cult of the *devas* becomes more firmly established. Now and again, priestly celebrants of former times—*pitrus*, "fathers"—are elevated to divine rank.

Above the gods or apart from them, great abstract forces animate the world, the chief of them being *rita*, "order"—at once cosmic and ritual or moral.

Cosmology

Cosmology is represented in the Vedas by a set of rather indefinite ideas; so is cosmogony, the creation of the world being described in a variety of metaphors and inconclusive myths. There is some notion, at times a precise one, of a spiritual principle equivalent to what we call the soul. There is no fixed, definite image of hell, but paradise is fairly clearly defined as the world of "pious actions"; man ascends to it by "the way of the gods." It lies in the third heaven and the joys it promises are exclusively material. And, in any case, Vedic man asks for nothing beyond this present life, the span of a hundred years to which he aspires; he has no clear conception of subsequent rebirths, though certain ambiguous allusions can perhaps be interpreted in that sense. Yama, the first man and in consequence the first to experience death, became (perhaps subsequently) the King of the Dead, the master of the underworld, or, according to another version of his story, the ruler of paradise.

In the Brahmanas (p. 6) almost the whole of the cosmogonic task is assumed by Prajapati, "lord of created

things"; as well as being the Creator he is the personification of Sacrifice, the force that gathers and arranges the scattered elements so as to bring about *rita*. But we find another development running parallel to this one: the myth-creating imagination, already much reduced in power in the Atharva-Veda, becomes more attenuated still so that at least where the text is concerned we find it making way for speculative philosophy.

Philosophy

The Rig-Veda, especially the later hymns in that collection, evinces the first stirrings of speculation about the single, neuter principle that lies at the origin of the world and that embraces the plurality of created things. At the same time the sacred formula, which in its most austere form is referred to as *brahman* (a noun which is neuter, like the principle itself) tends to be exalted to the status of a major principle; and from the end of the period of the Brahmanas this principle, stripped of every mythical and ritualistic contingency, becomes the accepted notion of the universal soul or Absolute. Speculation of this type reaches its apogee in the Upanishads, in which the myth-creating thought of earlier times is not so much rejected as drawn ever more closely into a structure of equivalences and even identities between microcosm and macrocosm. The search for equivalences was the basis of thought in the Rig-Veda, but at that stage it was still unsystematic and produced no clear-cut result. The goal now comes clearly into sight; it consists in perceiving that the individual soul (*atman*) is really and essentially identical with

the universal soul (*brahman*). This is the meaning of the famous equation *tat tvam asi*, "you are that": you, the individual, resemble the universal principle. This is the "truth of truths," leading to deliverance. The hymns make no mention of deliverance; in the Brahmanas the worshiper goes no further than to ask that he shall not "die again" (after the end of his present life), and the main stress is laid on works. But in the Upanishads the stress is on enlightenment and the trend of religious striving is turned toward positive knowledge of spiritual truth. It is clear, all the same, that mythology and ritual continued without change for a long time and that the boldly reflective tendency inaugurated by the Upanishads remained the concern only of limited and more or less esoterically minded circles.

Ritual

Although we are acquainted with the mythology through the Rig-Veda and with the subsequent philosophy principally through the Upanishads, these texts have little to tell us of the cult, the form of worship. For that we must consult the Brahmanas and, still more, the Sutras, which describe it with exemplary thoroughness. But this is not at all to imply that certain fairly elaborate forms of religious ceremony did not exist from the dawn of the Vedic period; indeed, it is possible to reconstruct their essential features.

Vedic worship is based on sacrifice. Sacrifice is solemn homage paid to the gods; it is carried out in the form of a more or less lengthy ceremony culminating in offerings made to the sacred Fire. Its function is to establish communication

with the divine world, the help of which is sought in securing general well-being or some particular advantage. It is true that there are certain "fixed" sacrifices, corresponding to days in the calendar, that are in principle devoid of any votive intention, but any one of these sacrifices, or a part of it, can be made the vehicle for such an autonomous intention; it appears only as the "formulae" that accompany the various movements and actions.

The offering is usually some product of the land (rice or other grain, milk, or *ghrita*, melted butter, the modern *ghi*) but sometimes consists of parts of an animal victim (a he-goat, as a rule). It is divided into two portions; one of them is cast into the fire and the other is eaten or drunk by the officiating priests and the lay sacrificant who has secured the priests' services and in whose interest the ceremony is performed. Another offering, the dominant one in the most important sacrifices, is *soma*, a somewhat mysterious plant the juice of which possesses intoxicating properties and is pressed out in a complicated series of operations.

The means of sacrifice is the fire, the preparation of which forms a ceremony in itself. As a rule three fires are used, arranged around a shallow pit that serves as an altar. The layman and his wife are present at the sacrifice; he is even allowed to utter some of the formulae, but his essential function is to distribute the fees (which are sometimes fabulously large) to the various officiants. The latter are supervised by the *brahman*, who watches in silence and points out any mistake or mishap; the *hotar* makes the oblations and recites specially chosen passages from the Rig-Veda; the *udgatar* chants verses chosen from the Sama-Veda; and the

adhvaryu is responsible for the countless gestures and recitations that are prescribed in the Yajur-Veda and that form the main fabric of the ceremony. In all, including assistants, as many as sixteen or seventeen priests may take part.

The sacrificial site is an open threshing floor, consecrated anew for each ceremony; there is no temple and there are no images. Among the paraphernalia of worship, besides vases and spoons each of which has its allotted purpose, we may note in passing the pieces of tile on which dough is spread and which are then placed on the fire.

The shortest rite is the *Agnihotra*, the "oblation to the fire," a simple offering of milk to Agni, carried out at morning and evening by the manual priest (*adhvaryu*) and the lay celebrant. More complicated sacrifices are carried out at full and new moon; these are vegetable sacrifices, which set the pattern for all other sacrifices and require two officiants. Rites every four months mark the changes of the seasons and are divided into three series (with a fourth, subsidiary series); traces of popular influence are much in evidence here. There are also ceremonies of the first fruits, and a mass of votive and expiatory rites occurring in accordance with the lunar fortnights.

Animal sacrifice, in which a he-goat is strangled and offered up, is modeled on the full- and new-moon ceremonies and can be either an independent occasion or part of one of the *soma* sacrifices. The latter are the most solemn of all. The *Agnishtoma*, the basic type, is a sequence of three pressings with lengthy preliminaries each time; the layman and his wife must be consecrated, the *soma* purchased, hearths and altars set up. The ceremony itself consists of offerings punctu-

ated by recitation and singing, with all the priests present taking part. A curious feature of the *Agnishtoma* is the *Pravargya*, in which warm milk in a consecrated vessel is offered up to the Ashvins. The service also exists in more extensive forms requiring from two to twelve days, and there are even "sessions," which fill a whole year and can in theory extend to twelve years. The "great observance" is a winter solstice feast that is part of the year-long session known as "the progress of the cows."

Finally there are the holidays, which, since they are *soma* sacrifices too, differ at bottom very little from the foregoing but which celebrate events in the life of the ruler: the *Rajasuya*, or "king's consecration," in which the newly enthroned king is sprinkled by a priest and by representatives of the people; the *Vajapeya*, or "draught of strength," a royal religious feast after a military victory, which includes a race between seventeen horse-drawn chariots; and last, the *Ashmavedha*, or "horse sacrifice," the most sumptuous of all this class of occasions, the preparations for which take a year or even two.

Besides *soma*, which was a noble liquor, there was *sura*, a rough spirit used as an offering in private rites. Finally, certain ceremonies were preceded by the erection of a monument made of bricks, a process accompanied by numerous offerings and detailed symbolism.[1]

[1] For the symbolism of the Vedic altar and every movement in the building of it, see Mircéa Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Pantheon, 1954). The purpose of the symbolism, psychologically speaking, was to realize in the participant the "annihilation of time" and the return to the primal unity "preceding" division and multiplicity.—Tr.

Domestic rites; Magic

The Vedic rites proper are the solemnest ones; the others (by which is meant chiefly those conducted privately, at home) are, despite appearances to the contrary, little more than primitive Hindu rites that have insinuated themselves into the Veda. They are performed by the head of a family on his own hearth, usually without a priest. They consist of little daily offerings of rice and barley to certain of the deities; some of these offerings, those known as *balis*, are thrown onto the ground or into the air instead of into the fire. Monthly, seasonal, votive, and expiatory rites, offerings to the sacred snake, rites of hospitality, agricultural festivals: all these belong to the category of private devotions. So do the "sacraments," the various consecrations that mark the stages of an Indian's life from birth or even before it to death and the beyond. Ritual purification is more in evidence than it is in public worship. As these purifications have remained almost unaltered from one end to the other of the Indian tradition, we shall deal with them in a single passage (p. 96).

We shall do the same with magic (p. 92), which gained a footing alongside the normal rituals and even usurped a place within them but the nature of which is utterly different from theirs. The sorcerer (who, when he is performing his function on behalf of the ruler, is given the title of "chaplain") works on behalf of an individual; neither society nor any corporate standard has any part in the affair and the aim is less to ask a boon than to exert control. And, while an extensive symbolism is employed, the deities and all the usual apparatus of worship are either relegated to a minor role or even

omitted altogether. In addition to magic much recourse was had to divination, making use of dreams, the stars and planets, animal behavior, and so on. Finally, though the documents do not explicitly tell us so, there is little doubt that various ascetic practices had sprung up, foreshadowing the Yoga of classical India.

Conclusion

Vedic religion developed some aspects of religious life to the prejudice of others, which, as far as our present knowledge can tell us, remained in abeyance. Vedism is above all a religion of ritual and knows nothing of what we call faith. "Faith" in the Vedic sense, *shraddha*, amounts to little more than observing rites strictly and having confidence in their efficacy; faulty observance is the offense most stringently to be avoided, and the moral imperative is a command to make religious donations and to practice good works. Some of the hymns however, notably those to Varuna, seem to display other tendencies, which are temporarily suppressed in the Brahmanas but point the way to later developments; it can be said with some reason that the Veda contains in germ everything India was later to bring to maturity. Despite many passages the interpretation of which is difficult or even so far impossible, the hymns undoubtedly bear witness to a fervor and a dynamism the presence of which must not be forgotten, underlying as it does the calculated rigor of the texts of later periods.

Domestic worship has continued into our own day; mythology was successfully accommodated to a changing

social climate; most of the intellectual activity arising in post-Vedic times was fertilized by the philosophy to which Vedism had given birth; and there is historical evidence, in the centuries preceding the birth of Christ and for many centuries following it, that the solemn rituals of Vedism were continually practiced and that the old traditions of religious thought remained vigorously alive. Both have continued into our own times, as archaic and fragmentary survivals from a remote past.

"doctrine of the Law,"[2] starts off by being religious in tone but gradually becomes impregnated with secular elements, such as the rudiments of a legal code, problems of government and administration, and so forth. Thus the famous text known as the Laws of Manu, the exact date of which cannot be determined but which most probably appeared about the beginning of the Christian era, gives a fairly complete picture of Indian society, with its classes and castes, but also includes the rules of observance followed in the traditional domestic rites; it opens with a cosmogonic exordium and closes with a doctrinal discourse on action, the destiny of the soul, and the way of deliverance. Other, similar treatises are more consistently secular, but they too bear a religious stamp.

Epics

The Great Epic develops gradually, beginning in the second century B.C. (some of its episodes date back even further) among bards and genealogists attached to various principalities in northern India. These long stories, undergoing successive accretions and modifications, emerged finally in the form of two enormous epics, the *Mahabharata*, or "Great War of the Bharatas," and the Ramayana, or "Deeds of Rama." The process took four or five centuries. Both works center round royal figures who have divine connections and privileges. The first recounts the adventures of the family of

[2] *Dharma* is usually translated "law," but the reader should bear in mind the useful suggestion made by Mr. Marco Pallis in his translation of René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, tr. Marco Pallis (London: Luzac, 1945) of "norm" (or, as we might add, "inherent norm").—TR.

the Pandavas, five brothers hated by their cousins, in opposition to whom they claim the right to govern the kingdom. The tortuous struggle between the two parties leads up to a fearful battle in which most of the protagonists are killed; the five brothers and their common wife, Draupadi, survive, only to be carried off soon afterward by a supernatural death. The second epic, which is shorter and more concentrated, gives the life story of the hero Rama, who has married the princess Sita; a demon abducts her, and Rama sets out to find her, winning her back at the end of a protracted war; but, as the tradition of epic misfortune demands, Sita in her turn goes out into the forest and meets a supernatural death. Both works are religious in many respects: not only by virtue of the miraculous scenes in which they are steeped—an aspect reinforced (though this may be due to a later revision) by their having divine heroes, Krishna in one case and Rama in the other—but also and above all by the way they continually preach the Hindu ethic and Hindu ideal, caste duties, the Brahman's privileges, and so on. This is carried so far that at times, at least in the *Mahabharata*, the story seems intended merely as an illustration of *dharma*, and it is not without reason that the *Mahabharata* has been regarded as the very canon of Hinduism; the *Ramayana* is more secular by contrast. One episode in the former has the quality of a kind of Gospel. This is the *Bhagavad-Gita*, or "Song of the Blessed One," the speech that the hero Krishna, charioteer to Arjuna (one of the five brothers) addresses to his companion before the battle in order to spur him into action. He shows him that only disinterested actions are valid, and ends by gradually drawing Arjuna's thoughts upward toward the Supreme

Being who watches over all actions and from whom alone these actions derive efficacy; at the same time he points the way to the methods by which contact with this Supreme Being can be attained. A dazzling theophany takes place: the "charioteer" reveals his true nature: he himself is the Supreme Being whom Arjuna has been obscurely seeking. The *Bhagavad-Gita* exercised a very considerable influence; it was venerated by numerous sects, and endlessly recited, commentated upon, imitated, and translated.

The Puranas and Similar Works

At first sight, the Puranas are closer than are the Epics to what we would call religious treatises; they give leisurely, detailed expositions of doctrines on religious custom and ritual, they tell of pilgrimages, feast-days, and the rudiments of mythology—the Great Goddess's battles with demons, Shiva's martial, erotic, or ascetic achievements, Krishna's life story. They claim to be historically valid and to set down the history of royal dynasties or at least to establish their genealogy, citing an immemorially ancient cosmogony and theogony as the basis of this history. Gradually interpolations creep in, loading the Puranas with all sorts of other material. Some of the Puranas seem to have a sectarian impulse; the eighteen major ones are traditionally classed as Vishnuite, Shivaite, or Brahmanistic (dedicated to Vishnu, Shiva, or Brahma). The most famous of them, though not the oldest, is the *Bhagavata-Purana*, which relates the life of the divine hero Krishna (p. 46) and emphasizes those parts of it that underlie his cult;

this text is the rallying point of the sects devoted to him.

The development of the Puranic literature extends, broadly speaking, from the opening centuries of our era to the twelfth century or perhaps later. Similar in character to the minor or secondary Puranas are a number of hymns, litanies, and panegyrics in praise of holy places. To the same body of literature we can also attach the *Yoga-vasistha*, an impressive philosophical and legendary poem that may have been composed in the tenth century, and the *Caturvargacintamani* of Hemadri (thirteenth century), a vast miscellaneous collection intermediate in character between the Puranic genre and the *Smriti* (p. 21).

Easier to attach to sects or groups of sects are certain treatises analogous to the Puranas, which are sometimes known generically as Tantras, "Books." Usually these are divided into three classes: the Vishnuite treatises, or Samhitas ("Collections"), the Shivaite, or Agamas ("Traditions"), and finally the Tantras proper, associated with an aspect of Hindu religion that is named Tantrism after them (p. 70). Tantras have continued to be written almost down to our own times.

Other Sanskrit Texts

Of the writings that remain to be enumerated here, some pertain to individual sects and will accordingly be alluded to in Chapter 6, and others are composed with deliberate art and belong to literary genres in the proper sense. At this point we shall examine the latter. (a) First of all, the category of Sanskrit texts that can fairly be classed as *belles-lettres*:

stories and romances, and lyrical, didactic, and dramatic poetry. Although the stories (other than those belonging to the Buddhist and Jain traditions) have only a slightly religious tincture, there are a number of plays and a still larger number of poems the inspiration of which is religious. Many of them render in popular form the philosophical doctrines that, as we have seen, are closely connected with religion; others are directly religious, since they are hymns in honor of one or another of the deities. Thus we have lyrical strophes addressed to Vishnu, or Shiva, or the Goddess; odes to the sun; and poems with titles like "The Wave of Grace" or "The Wave of Beatitude," "The Beauty of Inner Reconciliation," and so on. A dramatic work such as "The Moonrise of Knowing" (eleventh century) is an allegorical depiction of the victory of Vishnuite Vedanta (p. 27) over other sects and over heresy. Such works aim explicitly at edification. But most of the major lyrical works, those known as the "Great Poems" or lyrical epics, also use stories the origin of which is at least semi-religious in that they come from the Great Epic or the Puranas; moreover in exalting *dharma* (p. 33) they touch on ritual and adoration and contain echoes of myth and religious legend. For this reason we can regard Kalidasa, the great lyric and dramatic poet of the fifth century (his date is a matter of controversy, be it said) as a religious poet; for ethics, the social order, and the tasks of royalty are all aspects of a single reality, a single norm, another aspect of which is religion.

(b) There are certain striking works that deserve to be placed in a category of their own, not so much for their technique, which is that of other lyric poetry, as for their content. These ambiguous poems can be read at once as erotic liter-

ature and as vehicles of the most fervent devotion.[3] Their origin lies in the pietistic tendencies that arose in a certain period. The best known among them is the *Gitagovinda*, or "Song of the Herdsman" (twelfth century), a kind of heightened pastoral describing in intensely realistic terms, like those of the Song of Songs, the loves of the god Krishna and the girl Radha.

(c) Finally, the philosophical literature. The dividing line drawn in the West between philosophy and religion is absent. What are sometimes called, incorrectly, philosophical systems are really "views" (*darshana*)[4] and constitute different paths of approach to a single, suprasensible reality; they are all aimed more or less directly at deliverance. From being freely speculative they become soteriological and turn toward theism. The first of these *darshanas*, Mimamsa, consisting originally of a critical commentary on Vedic ritual, eventually showed almost as great a preoccupation with theological problems as the second *darshana*, Vedanta, or "Goal of the Veda," which from the start sought to erect a mystical ontology on the foundation of the Upanishads (p. 6). Moreover Vedanta, at least from the twelfth century on, was largely drawn into the orbit of certain sects and adapted to promoting such values as devotional faith and love, grace, and surrender of the self to God. Sankhya, the polar opposite of Vedanta in that it postulated an essential dualism of matter and spirit, eventually became theistic; Yoga, on the other hand, had

[3] Illuminating examples of this device will be found in Mircéa Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (New York: Pantheon, 1958).

[4] There is perhaps no English word for *darshana*, which is akin to one of the meanings of the Greek θεωρια, a kind of inward beholding.—Tr.

been so from the time of its becoming a *darshana*. In Yoga, philosophical thought borrowed from Sankhya is combined with a practical quest, that for a psychophysiological technique giving access to superhuman states and powers. In some respects Yoga is a magic rather than a religion, but it was drawn nonetheless into the stream of Tantrism (p. 70) and of Hinduism in general. As for the two remaining *darshanas*, Nyaya and Vaisheshika, they were attempts at scientific explanation, bearing in the first case on formal logic and the theory of knowledge, and in the second on "categories" of knowledge and the theory of atoms; both of them felt the tidal pull of religion so that, for example, the logic built up by the Nyaya schools was used to prove the existence of God.

In conclusion, we must note that mystical ideas percolated into semi-scientific disciplines such as alchemy, and that astronomy long went hand in hand with astrology.

Non-Sanskrit Sources

We have to consider, on the one hand, languages derived from Sanskrit, the neo-Indian or modern Indo-Aryan languages as they are sometimes called (notably Bengali, Marathi, and Hindi) and, on the other, the Dravidian languages indigenous to southern India and originally quite separate from Sanskrit, though later subject to its influence in different degrees. Both groups developed an enormous religious literature. This literature often emphasizes new aspects of Hindu belief, aspects more or less poorly attested in Sanskrit literature; thus one finds certain differences in the south

from what obtained in the north, as regards mythology and ritual. In the north, the use of vernacular languages brought into written currency various elements—popular notions, aspects of popular worship, and sectarian practice—that had failed to gain entry into the always somewhat hieratic realm of the ancient literature.

While omitting to sketch this considerable field in any detail we may mention, in Bengali literature, Chandidas (fourteenth century), whose mystical love poetry is of a high order,[5] and, in our own day, the versatile and influential Tagore; in Hindi the free adaptation by Tulsidas (fourteenth century) of the *Ramayana*, and the work of Kabir (1440-1518).

Foreign Sources

Greek sources, notably Megasthenes (third century B.C.), make a by no means negligible contribution to our knowledge of Hinduism. The same is true of Chinese sources, such as the account given by the pilgrim Hiuan-Tsang in the seventh century; and Arab sources, especially the traveler al-Biruni (tenth century).

Modern documentary sources include French and above all Portuguese travelers' accounts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and the *Lettres édifiantes* and *Moeurs, institutions et cérémonies des peuples de l'Inde,* by the eighteenth-century Abbé J.-A. Dubois (originally published in English, 1817).

[5] See the paper on "Sahaja" in A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1957).—Tr.

Archaelogical Sources

From Indian inscriptions, information on religion comes to us only intermittently, and hardly at all until the fourth century; among the most instructive are those of Valabhi in the north (sixth century), and, from the eleventh century on, lengthy inscriptions in the south relating to the management of the principal holy places. There is also numismatic evidence, especially concerning the Gupta dynasty, that is of value.

However, it is chiefly archaeology in the wider sense that is of interest to us here. We must leave aside the prehistoric, so-called Mohenjodaro civilization, with its debatable vestiges of proto-Hinduism (p. 33); we shall also pass over the Vedic period, which left behind it no monuments of sculpture or architecture. The earliest evidence to hand, dating roughly from the beginning of the Christian era, consists of pillars (usually inscribed) the capitals of which are sometimes decorated with figurative carvings, for example of the celestial bird Garuda. But for a considerable period the early monuments are exclusively Buddhist, even though in some cases they were built on Hindu sites and made use of Hindu themes; thus for example we find the legend of Rama represented at Bharhut. There is hardly any Brahman art until the fourth century, when it appears in cave sanctuaries (as at Udayagiri) and open-air temples (Aihole). We must wait till the seventh century for major monuments, such as the monolithic temples of Mavalipuram (region of Madras); the subterranean temples of Elephanta (the *trimurti*), near Bom-

bay; and farther south, hewn out in an open quarry, Ellora (eighth century) with its Kailasa temple.

Temple cities, formed by the successive building of shrines, covered halls, inner courtyards, and so forth, over a period of time, begin appearing in the south about 1000 A.D.; Bhuvaneshvara, in Orissa, belongs to this period. Later, also in the south, sculptural monuments start appearing, as at Cidambaram, Madura, and Shrirangam—massive groups in which the whole surface of the stone is alive with sculpture. Mural painting appears from the time of Ellora; its iconography, both Vishnuite and Shivaite, is profuse, and the appearance, attitudes, and ornaments appropriate to each god are observed in accordance with a canon as rigorous as that dominating them in literature. The peak of sculptural development is reached with the dancing Shivas[6] of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries.

But the significance of artistic achievements does not necessarily correspond to that of cult, doctrine, and philosophy; thus the architecture and sculpture of both Buddhism and Jainism suggest by their quantity a greater importance than these movements actually possessed, whereas Hinduism came late to plastic art and suffered an earlier and more decisive decadence in that field than it did in literature.

Hindu sculptures representing Harihara (p. 43) are found in the Khmer Empire earlier than the tenth century, and there are bas-reliefs on epic subjects at Angkor Wat.

[6] The symbolism of these figures is beautifully described by Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva*.—TR.

3 / MYTHS AND BELIEFS

General

Hinduism can be studied in two ways, either as a whole or as a collection of separate entities, that is to say, of the various sects of which it is composed. Each method has its advantages. But, since the sects drew on a common source and thus repeated each other a good deal, and since, moreover, they represent in general a relatively late development, it will be best to begin by describing the main lines of Hinduism as if it were a unity.

What is Hinduism? It is not a religion in quite the sense in which we use that word in the West; we cannot give a first definition of it in negative terms by isolating it from its non-religious background. On one side, it is inseparable from philosophy; on another, from communal and social life. Hindu society is governed by the framework of classes and castes and "stages of life," or *ashramas* (p. 100); it is these social

factors that determine the concept of duty, the moral imperative, which in itself is essentially religious. The important concept of *dharma*, meaning properly the "support" of creatures and objects, denotes law in the widest sense, the presiding order that runs through every Hindu normative discipline, but also and more particularly it denotes moral law and religious merit; *dharma* is the only translation for our word "religion," than which however it is is in some ways narrower and in others wider. People are born into Hinduism rather than converted to it, since the Hindu mentality is a function of the general framework of Indian life. But, naturally, this is not to deny that at a very early stage the idea of *dharma* was spread by conquest or peaceful infiltration among peoples who had originally not possessed it; how else explain the ascendancy it won over the greater part of the sub-continent?

Hinduism is a combination of various elements, of which the leading one is Vedism, the direct transmission of the beliefs and speculations recorded in the Veda. But not everything found in the Veda and, subsequently, in classical India is of Aryan origin; it must be conceded that Hinduism, which took shape long before the texts, already existed in a primitive form in the Vedic period and perhaps earlier still. Though the conclusion can be only tentative, certain evidence (a prototype of the god Shiva, representations of the *linga*, or phallus, figurative allusions to Yoga practices) found in the non-Aryan civilization of the Indus basin (Mohenjodaro and Harappa), a civilization that flourished some two thousand or twenty-five hundred years before our era, has been interpreted as pointing to a cult of Hindu type. In addition, it

seems clear that many Vedic practices that were incorporated into the official worship, as well as most if not all of the corpus of private and magical ritual, stem from a pre-classical Hinduism.

Extraneous Influences

From the start, and increasingly as Hinduism established itself through the length and breadth of India, it was impregnated with indigenous influences by contact between Vedic culture and the non-Aryan population—basically a Dravidian population, whatever other names may also have been given to it. Indeed, Hinduism contains many pseudo-Hindu touches, which are part of a more or less primitive religious folklore found elsewhere than in India. Every local cult exhibits such touches: village gods (p. 49), naïve symbolic emblems, vestiges of animism, and so on. Much of all this passed over into the normal Hinduism, so much so that by stretching the facts a little one could make out a case for regarding Hinduism simply as an accumulation of local cults, unconnected with Vedism. But we must resist this temptation, remembering that what counts in a religion is less the elements of which it is made than the new system into which they are converted, the creative effort involved. Despite many analogies with forms prevalent in Iran or closer at hand, and in Southeast Asia, and despite the existence of a latent, widespread shamanism, it must be granted that Hinduism is an impressively original creation.

To these indigenous influences must perhaps be added the influence of contact with other civilizations. To begin with

ancient times, it is highly unlikely that Greece supplied anything to India in the matter of belief; it has been conjectured that the use of images, which was unknown in the Vedic period, was instigated by Greek example, but no proof has been put forward. Again, the superficial affinities between the theory of *samsara* (p. 66) and the Pythagorean doctrines are the result of a common substratum, not of any direct borrowing. It is possible that Iranian influence had something to do with establishing solar worship in northern India for a few centuries (a cult toward which a tendency is in any case to be found in the Veda), and in propagating certain Mazdaistic influences, but it is worth noting that the worship of Mitra (who, in the Veda, owes none of his characteristics to Iran except through common prehistoric origins) achieved only a moderate development in post-Vedic India. Numismatic evidence suggests that it was foreign rulers such as the Kushanas (first and second centuries) who imported a modicum of Iranian, perhaps Babylonian, beliefs and set up the priesthood of the Magi on Indian soil.

Coming down to the twelfth century, we have to decide whether Indian thought received any lasting stamp from Islam, with which it was to remain so long in contact. It is indeed observable that from then on there arise sectarian movements of definitely Hindu origin that appear to be inspired by Islamic ideas: the suppression of idols and an emphasis on the austerer, more rarefied aspects of religion and on mystical practices. Modern writers who talk of a rapprochement between Hinduism and Islam, and who (very reasonably) compare Hindu pietism with Sufic mysticism, like to imply that matters would have gone rather differently

with Hinduism were it not for the proximity of Islam. This argument is difficult to refute. Nevertheless, except perhaps in Kabir (p. 29) and in some modern sects deriving from his or influenced by it, there is nothing at all in the evolution of Indian thought but both can and should be accounted for by the internal logic and inherent energy of Hinduism itself. Hindu texts that show a clear debt to Islam are few in number and their combined importance is small. The most noteworthy effect of Islamic influence was to reinforce, in one sect or another, the caste system and the Hindu rules of life.

As for Christian influence, it was restricted to modern times and has affected only a small minority here and there. And as for the connections that some have thought to see between the Nativity of Christ and the childhood of Krishna, they are completely illusory; so is the supposed Christian origin of the myth of Svetadvipa, the faraway island that an episode of the *Mahabharata* describes as inhabited by white men adoring Narayana. Did Christianity perhaps touch the fringe of the Indian world in the time of the Scytho-Parthian king Gondophares (first century), who, according to legend, was visited by St. Thomas when the latter undertook to convert the people of India? There was indeed a Nestorian community at Malabar, but nothing is heard of it prior to the fourth century; the arrival of the Jesuits in 1600 put an end to its activities.

Connections with Buddhism and Jainism

Initially, Buddhism and Jainism were simply movements of reform within the growing body of Hinduism. But since

these movements, both of them starting in the sixth century B.C., immediately evinced an anti-Brahmanic tendency, rejecting the authority of the Veda and taking up philosophical positions of an entirely new type, we can consider them from the Hindu point of view as constituting heresies. Jainism never expanded very widely; it held its own in most of the places where it had originally sprung up but lost ground later, at the time of the great persecutions that, especially in the twelfth century, characterized the revival of the Shivaite and Vishnuite movements. Its influence on Hinduism seems to have been negligible. As for Buddhism, its decline on the Indian mainland began fairly early and, except for certain specific points such as the founding of monastic orders and the fostering of the doctrine of *ahimsa*, or non-violence, its action on Hindu society and practice is not easy to gauge; its influence on Hindu philosophy is easier to determine. In the great days of Hindu development we find new values intruding in the "middle period" Upanishads, such as the *Maitri Upanishad*; later (seventh-ninth century) there is persistent controversy between Hindu and Buddhist logicians or metaphysicians; and although there is no decisive influence one way or the other, since neither side yields an inch and the respective positions of both remain unaltered, this prolonged contact must at least have served to produce a more closely knit dialectic and a clearer expression of doctrine.

The Influence of Hinduism

Whereas Hinduism borrowed little, it did exert an influence—though it is hard to evaluate its extent—on other

systems of thought. Early Buddhism and Jainism would be inconceivable without a constant inflow of Hindu ideas. Some have even spoken, perhaps a shade rashly, of the Buddha's "Vedantism"; meaning that he held a kind of abstract belief that, in his followers, was soon submerged by a partial return to Hindu elements (vestiges of popular religion, belief in deities and spirits). It must be said, however, that such a development amounts to conservation rather than influence properly so called. Later, the evolution of Buddhism in India and, still more, outside it, and that of post-canonical Jainism, are typified by practices and imagery and thought that at times owe much to the ambiance of Hinduism. If, as there is reason to believe, Buddhist Tantrism (p. 70) originated as a graft on Hindu Tantrism, we have a capital example of Hindu influence, one that caused ideas of Hindu origin to be diffused over vast tracts of Asia.

It is uncertain whether Plotinus and the other Neo-Platonists of antiquity owed anything to the inspiration of the Upanishads. Much more probable is the influence of Yoga (p. 69), both as a physical technique and as a path of mystical development, on Taoism and Chinese thought. We know now that the ancient world, from the time of Alexander on, possessed fairly precise information about India; Megasthenes' account (third century B.C.) contains details concerning Indian religion that are by no means to be despised, and in the third century A.D. St. Hippolytus discusses the teachings of the Brahmans in a way that shows him to have been well informed. Hindu influence on Islaṃ is beyond dispute: both in Urdu and in Persian, dogmatic, mystical, and even narrative literature bears witness to it; a large number

of Indian texts were translated into both languages from the fourteenth century on, if not earlier; and there were several Moslem sects with a markedly Hindu tinge.

Finally, on the literary plane, we must point to the various general themes (transmigration, *karman*, mythology, cosmology, pantheism, Buddhist "pessimism") that have been taken up by a number of Western writers from the Romantic period on; not to mention the present wide-spread popularity of assorted kinds of neo-Hinduism, mixed up with Western ideas presented in Hindu trappings.

Expansion in Southeast Asia

What has sometimes been called the Hinduization of Southeast Asia—a process beginning in the second century B.C. and continuing approximately until the sixteenth A.D.—is a political rather than a religious phenomenon. Conversion was not the aim; conversion, a trite and hackneyed theme in Buddhism and Jainism, is unknown in Brahmanical India. What the princes and ruling classes in Southeast Asiatic countries were after was to imitate or impose Indian customs and to adopt a form of government by royalty, which was consistent with the Hindu ideal; they were interested in the pair *brahman-kshatriya* (p. 104), the cult of the *linga* (p. 48), and the Shivaistic version of the notion of sovereignty. This entailed adopting the corresponding religious conceptions. Thus, in Cambodia, the Khmer kings made Hinduism into a state religion, after it had coexisted with Buddhism from the second century on in the pre-Khmer empire of Fou-nan; in the fifth century Vishnuism makes its appearance and, after

being pushed out subsequently by Shivaism, recovers its advantage in the twelfth, thus following much the same curve as in India itself; vestiges of Hinduism have survived down to our own day. In Campa (Annam), Shivaism gained the upper hand but was saturated with local cults in the process. In Siam and Burma the Hindu contribution was negligible. But in Indonesia (beginning in the second century, as in Cambodia) it reached its apogee in Eastern Java in the eleventh century and in the sixteenth century underwent a renaissance that continued until well into our own century. A hybrid cult of Shiva and Buddha merged with Indonesian religious forms. Some of the Puranas (p. 24) are found to have been known in Java and elsewhere in the region; in Bali several of the Upanishads and some other Hindu texts, Shivaite and Tantric customs, and even Vedic beliefs, formed part of the religious life of the island.

Deities

Like that of the Vedic age (p. 8), the Hindu pantheon is enormous and rather untidily organized. Every deity in it is more or less independent, even when artificial connections have been devised between two or more. On examining the Great Epic we find ourselves picking out eight great gods who correspond loosely to the eight "guardians of the world" enumerated in the Laws of Manu, the Puranas, and elsewhere; they are the four tutelary deities of the eastern sky divided into two, and their names are Surya the Sun, Candra the Moon, (a god, not a goddess), Vayu the Wind, Agni the god of fire, Kamas the god of death and king of the under-

world (also known as Kala, or Time, and as Dharma, or Law), Varuna, lord of the waters, Indra, god of the rains and bearer of the thunderbolt (*vajra*) and a magician, and finally Kubera, god of wealth. They are all more or less of Vedic origin but their functions have been reduced or modified. The phenomenal, naturalistic aspect that, as might be expected, is prominent in the case of the first two is mostly eliminated from the others, but appears in adoration of sky and earth and of the five planets and the stars, and in incantations to Rahu, the eclipse-demon who swallows the moon.

Other gods dating from Vedic times are Mitra, the Ashvins, and the Maruts (p. 9), and various groups that will be dealt with below. The new mythology constantly took up new forms of the gods and new stories about them, but if it substituted much it suppressed little; nearly all the old material reappears in it. The ancient quarrel between Indra and the demon Vritra (p. 10), for example, continues, but the latter has been changed into a pious Brahman.

Invocations are of course made to the gods—to Kama, god of love, for instance, of whom it is told that urged by Indra he roused the passion of Shiva, who, in a rage at having been disturbed in his ascetic practices, burnt up Kama with his "third eye." Another personification of Love is Pradyumna, Krishna's son, sometimes portrayed as identical with Kama and sometimes as a distinct figure with separate attributes. Skanda (also known as Kumara, the Boy, or Karttikeya, the nurseling of the six Krittikas, or Pleiades) is a war-god, whose legend is amply supplied with scabrous details; he is a son of Shiva and in the south plays an important role as protector of the Brahmans, either under the Indo-Aryan name of Sub-

ramanya or the Dravidian name of Muruga or Sheyyava the Red, son of the terrible Great Goddess. A figure still richly honored in the devotion of the common people is Ganesha, the chief, as his name indicates, of the *ganas*, or divine troops, in Shiva's service. It is he who creates and demolishes obstacles and is invoked before religious, literary, or commercial undertakings; he has innumerable shrines in both north and south, his special function in the latter being to guard city gates. He is depicted in a manner all his own, with an elephant's head and a bulging belly; it need hardly be pointed out that many of his attributes are to be interpreted symbolically. In him as in a number of other deities or groups of deities there is a clearly marked erotic element.

The Great Gods

The most remarkable feature of classical Indian mythology is the coexistence, as part of a single visionary conception, of three great gods, Brahman, Vishnu, and Shiva. This trinity (in Sanskrit *trimurti*, "the three forms") does not appear as such until fairly late and does not quite become a separate object of worship, seeming rather to be a mythological reflection of the three *gunas* (p. 58). The first member of the group, Brahman—the personified form of the neuter noun of the Vedic period—whose role in the Trimurti is that of the creator, receives no adoration except in literature, in which he is honored with rhetorical epithets or, at most, celebrated in short narratives. He has no shrine of his own, except for one at Ajmer, and no cult; he never advanced far from the status of the abstract idea that gave rise to him.

But, on the other hand, Vishnu as preserver of the world and Shiva as destroyer are both figures of the first importance; the great mass of the faithful venerate one or the other, and their various divine functions have extended in every direction and absorbed a number of minor deities in the process. In many sects one or the other is regarded as the Supreme Being. And though the antithesis between them is strongly accentuated in literature it is far less strong in actual religious practice; there are even mixed figures such as Harihara, in whose person Vishnu and Shiva become a single symbol, and round whom at a late period the beginnings of a cult took shape.

Vishnu

Vishnu, who as we have seen (p. 10) was a deity of slight importance in the Vedic period, became from the time of the Epic one of the leading figures, a beneficent one on the whole, though he has a formidable side to him as well. With his four symbolic attributes (conch, disk, club, and lotus) and his twelve or twenty-four attitudes, he is presented in a clear focus. Yet the mythology concerning him is rather uneventful: he is above all a slumbering god, represented as reclining on the ocean of chaos, the infinite serpent Shesha, which forms his couch and protects him with its thousand heads; he meditates on the world, and at his periodical awakening produces from his navel a lotus from which Brahman will rise to create the universe anew. But he is also shown as riding on the celestial eagle Garuda, who also has a cult to himself. The names of Vishnu, or rather those of the deities whose iden-

tities merged into his, are many: in the south he is Ranganatha, Venkatesha, or Tirupati; in Mahratta territory, where special legends attach to him, he is Vithoba or Nitthal; and almost everywhere he is Narayana (sometimes Naranarayana), who may originally have been a water sprite. Vishnu inherited some of the functions of the Vedic Indra, whose ally he was; something of Indra's fiery and solar character can be found in him. Since he is a *deus otiosus* his power is necessarily delegated; this is moreover in line with the "nondualism" inherent in Vishnuite mythology. This delegation of power occurs in two ways. One is of a learned and theological character: the *vyuhas*, or "divisions of function," which through the figure of Vasudeva give rise to three abstract characters (supposedly the brother, son, and grandson of Vasudeva-Krishna) representing creation, conservation, and destruction and thus establishing this cosmic triad at the heart of Vishnuism. The *vyuhas* first appear in an episode of the *Mahabharata*. The other way, more widely diffused and more popular in nature, is that of the *avataras*. The word *avatara* means "descent"; it denotes a kind of incarnation periodically undergone by Vishnu, the close of each of these transformations being marked by his descending to earth to fight a demon, in other words to ward off a deadly peril. Thus the Supreme Being functions as providence—a kind of collective providence, manifested at long intervals of time. During the classical centuries, with their systematizing tendency, these *avataras* were marshaled into a group of ten or, in some texts, more (there are twenty-two of them in the *Bhagavata*). The notion being a conveniently adaptable one, it was passed on from Vishnu to Shiva and other deities and was even used

as a happy method of deifying great men of the past, real or legendary. This development of the *avatara* principle is at least partly Vedic in origin; it seems to correspond to the desire, which we have already remarked upon, to reconcile the urge toward monotheism with an irresistible fondness for a multiplicity of cults.

The first *avataras* are theriomorphic. Vishnu the Fish comes to save King Manu Vaivasvata; this is an Indian form of the universal theme of the Flood. Vishnu the Tortoise appears in the "churning" episode (dealt with below). Vishnu the Boar raises the earth, which the demon Hiranyaksha had dragged down to the bottom of the sea. After this come mixed forms, the Lion-Man and the Dwarf, two metamorphoses in which the god fights respectively the demons Hiranyakashipu and Bali; the story of the Dwarf takes up the Vedic motif of the three strides of Vishnu. Next come the warlike *avataras*: Rama-with-the-ax freeing the world from the tyranny of the warrior caste (*kshatriyas*), who had revolted against the authority of the Brahmans; Rama the hero (Ramacandra), the protagonist of the *Ramayana* (p. 22), conquering the demon Ravana; and Krishna with his countless exploits. The ninth *avatara* is none other than Buddha—this being a bold attempt to assimilate the founder of the great heresy into the main body of orthodox Vishnuism. The tenth is Kalkin, the future Messiah, a figure with a horse's head who will come down and re-establish order throughout the world.

An extremely popular legend is that of the annual churning of the ocean in which the forces of the gods and those of the Asuras take part side by side; Vishnu the Tor-

toise, at the bottom of the watery depths, acts as the pedestal supporting Mount Meru (p. 60), round which the serpent Shesha is entwined like a rope. The goal of the exploit is the winning of marvelous treasures, in particular ambrosia, the drink of the gods; but thanks to a strategem of Vishnu the Asuras are balked of their share in the victory, to the advantage of the gods.

The most fully developed story in the whole of Indian mythology is that of Krishna. Destined to become the head of the clan of the Yadavas, he is menaced by the hatred of his cruel uncle, King Kamsa. His birth takes place in secret, a circumstance that furnishes the start for a number of fabulous adventures; we are told of the superhuman labors he performs while yet a child. As a youth he becomes the divine cowherd who plays his flute amid his milkmaids, who are all passionately in love with him and dance round him in a ring —a scene that provides the setting, at once mystical and erotic, for the fervor which characterized his cult in medieval India; the scene lies in the sacred wood of Vrindavana, in the region of Mathura. Later, Krishna appears as a leader and a fighter and the founder of cities; he establishes his realm in Dvaraka, on the mouths of the Indus, and carries off the beautiful princess Rukmini and makes her his wife. Among other adventures he takes part in the war of the Bharatas at the side of the Pandavas, his cousins; he is the superhuman hero of the *Bhagavad-Gita* (p. 23). He meets an obscure death; the clan he is leading having been wiped out by internecine conflict, he retires into the forest, where a huntsman, aiming at him in error, hits him in the heel, the only vulnerable spot in his body. Various amorous tales are told

of his son Pradyumna and his grandson Aniruddha, and his elder brother Balarama (Rama the Strong) has a whole cycle of stories to himself. In the south the pastoral, dancing Krishna is replaced by Malon or Karuppa. Almost every aspect of the Indian spirit is contained in the composite complex character of Krishna. The ancient Greeks, alluding to the Indian Hercules, seem to have joined the characteristics of Krishna to those of Shiva.

Shiva

The other great deity, Shiva, is essentially ambivalent. As destroyer he is identified with Death and Time; he is Hara "the Abductor" and sometimes Bhairava, Terror, who takes sixty-four different forms. But he has also an aspect of restoration, he is "the beneficent one," indicated by his epithets *shiva, shambhu, shankara*; he presides over procreation and love-play and is even sometimes depicted as androgynous; in certain legends he is superior to the other gods of the Trinity and is shown creating the principal waters and placing in them the "golden seed" (Hiranyagarbha) that contains Brahman. His representation as a dancing king with many arms is loaded with cosmic symbolism; his patronage of philosophy and the arts is part of his function as creator. Finally he is also the ascetic who, seated in a Yoga posture on a Himalayan peak or on Mount Kailasa, with his body covered with ashes, is the prototype of all those who concentrate in their bodies the fire of *tapas* (austerity). Frequently he rides on the white bull Nandin. His attributes correspond to his many functions. Sometimes he is strikingly active and

plays the leading part in fights with demons and in violent scenes such as the destruction of Daksha's sacrifice, to which he had not been invited as was his due, and at which he appears as Virabhadra, one of his terrifying forms. At other times he is motionless and inert, a reclining white dwarf. Like Vishnu, he delegates his power to *shaktis,* or "energies," which emanate from him and are personified as women. But unlike Vishnu he intervenes on occasion in human affairs in the guise of a man, as when he becomes a huntsman and challenges the hero Arjuna. He eventually incorporated a large number of elements not originally his, among them a good deal of the nature and significance of the Vedic god Rudra (p. 9). The Greeks compared him with Dionysus. In southern India, where his cult did not establish itself so firmly, he figures under the name of Sundareshvara or Mulalinga and has a wife Minakshi ("eyes like those of a fish"), daughter of King Pandya.

Constantly associated with Shiva the Procreator is the phallus, or *linga,* but this connection may not have been there from the start; no doubt the *linga* was at first an independent symbol, naïvely and realistically fashioned, becoming a stylized ornament on its entry into classical Hinduism and no longer possessing, or at least not intended to evoke, any erotic connotation even when associated with the complementary symbol, the *yoni* ("womb"), in the form of a prism or cube with one of its surfaces slightly hollowed out. The Shivaite Puranas describe twelve "great *lingas*" or "primordial *lingas,*" by which are meant twelve holy places at which the *linga* is worshiped and which are presented as corresponding to twelve forms assumed by Shiva.

Feminine Deities

Goddesses are to be found at every level of Indian worship. The humblest deities are the village ones, the *gramadevatas*; nearly all of these are goddesses. Some of them are decidedly less dignified than others, most of them are surrounded by a rich tissue of legend, and between them they account for something like three-quarters of the worship of the country people in the north, and a little more than this in the south. On a higher level are the mother-figure goddesses, either individual figures or groups; one notable example is the group of seven "little mothers" under the auspices of Virabhadra and Ganesha. The development of such figures, who are the wives of gods (most often one or another of the wide variety of wives attributed to Shiva), proceeded hand in hand with the development of the concept of *shakti* (p. 114). A god's *shakti* is his energy, the dynamic principle that made it possible to derive the sensible world from the Absolute without prejudice to monism. The concept is an ancient one; the origin ascribed to it varies with the doctrinal point of view; it can be identified with the Vedantic *maya* (creative illusion) or, equally well, with *prakriti* (Matter, conceived as feminine), which is one of the postulates of Sankhya. It reaches its fullest expansion in the *shakta* sects (p. 114), which are named after it, and in Tantrism (p. 70), being connected in the latter with Shiva. It is represented in various forms; as Sati for example, the faithful wife who cast herself into the fire so as not to be present when her husband and father were quarreling (and who was the prototype of all the *satis*, or devoted widows who consented to be burned

alive on the funeral pyres of their husbands); or again as Parvati, "the girl from the mountain," or Uma, "the Beneficent," whose carnal and mystical union with the Divine Spouse is part of her cult, or more frequently, as Durga the Inaccessible, Chandi the Violent, Gauri the Wild or Kali the Black; or sometimes as Annapurna "who gives rice in abundance." Associated with several of these forms are a cycle of warlike tales about conflicts with demons (notably the buffalo-demon Mahisha) and a ritual practice based on blood sacrifice—which means, in the ultimate analysis, human sacrifice. Sometimes the goddess bears a serene, pacific aspect, as in the poets' vision that sees her as the "universal mother" and, in modern times, identifies her with Mother India; but for the most part she is a cruel, repugnant figure dripping with blood and hungry for human flesh, adorned with bracelets of snakes and a necklace and girdle of skulls.[1]

The figure is perhaps of non-Aryan origin; it is certainly met with in Dravidian territory, under the name of Korravei the Victorious. Her shrines and holy places are legion; some of them, the *pithas*, are reputedly situated at places whither the bones of Sati were scattered.

Just as Durga is the *shakti* of Shiva so the goddess

[1] We must beware of looking at this repulsive and barbarous figure with too literal a mind. If we take a philosophical standpoint we shall see the reality underlying the appearance. All Indian religion is like an allegory, and we must take care not to confuse the object of representation with the means. The bloodthirsty goddess is the flux of the unstable phenomenal world, which "devours" our own true life for just as long as we are possessed and bemused by phenomena, and from which we are essentially released insofar as we apprehend the underlying unity.—Tr.

Lakshmi or Shri—Beauty and Good Fortune—is that of Vishnu. She is a model spouse, a radiant and helpful figure. Sarasvati, a former river goddess, whose pedigree is given differently in different accounts, is the patroness of the arts, eloquence, and knowledge; she is also the inventor of Sanskrit. Radha, Krishna's favorite among the milkmaids, is given divine rank by sects such as the Nimbarkas, for example (p. 121), who make a cult of divine lovers. Finally, there is a multitude of lesser female divinities, some favorable but mostly formidable, such as the "little mothers" (*matrika, ambika*)—demons or ogresses who abound particularly in the south and who are said to take possession of children and to inflict sickness and other misfortunes.

Groups of Deities

The Hindu world is peopled with groups of supernatural figures in which the identity of each individual figure is indistinguishable. We have already encountered some of these groups, some of which are composed of male and others of female figures. There are the Asuras, the Daityas, and others like them, traditional enemies of the gods, against whom they wage, from the beginning of time, wars that reach no definite issue; in conformity with the usual ambivalence of mythological motifs they are also sometimes to be found serving the gods. Then there are the Nagas, who live underground and not only represent the race of snakes (*naga* means snake) and their mysterious kingdom in the bowels of the earth, but also embody memories of a tribal folklore and perhaps of ancient totemic clans. The Yakshas are another ambivalent group:

they are the servants of the god Kubera and have the power of conferring riches and magical transformations, but their wives, the Yakshinis, are demons, like other female groups such as the Dakinis, the Yoginis ("female adepts of Yoga"), and so forth. The Gandharvas, lascivious, faunlike creatures, half-human, half-animal, spirits of music and song, have as their associates the Apsaras, water nymphs who at the request of a god pit their seductive powers, sometimes successfully, against ascetics whose austerities are a threat to the god's dominion. Living near the Gandharvas in the clouds are the Vidyadharas, a tribe of magicians concerning whom there is a wealth of legends. These various hybrid beings interpenetrate the human, celestial, and demoniacal realms; and out of a feeling for system and order they are represented as being under the sway of one or another of the major deities, usually Shiva. On the other hand we do not find anywhere in Hinduism, any more than in the Veda itself, a clearly defined representation of the spirit of evil; the demons or devils are a plurality and in each case are linked with a particular legend and no other. Ravana, a prince of demons, Rama's enemy, is also the patron of an anti-demoniacal ritual.

Rama, and no doubt Krishna likewise, originated from the divinization of a human hero, other elements being added at the same time. Most of the epic heroes, such as for instance the universally popular leader of the monkey army fighting in alliance with Rama, the adroit and faithful Hanuman, were deified sooner or later, just as were many princes and founders of sects or cities, and even great writers; and the Vedic seers, the *rishis* of old, are automatically regarded as sacred figures. One of them, Agastya, is held to have brought Brah-

manical civilization to the people of the south; he made the Vindhya mountains bow their heads before he crossed them, with the result that this range never achieved its ambition of equaling the Himalayas in height. The cult of Agastya spread as far as the East Indies. The great royal dynasties pride themselves on being descended from heroes of immemorially ancient times, and there is a voluminous genealogy that divides these heroes into two groups, a solar and a lunar lineage. Besides the familiar Rama and Krishna these heroes include Manu, the first ruler and the father of present-day humanity, and another primordial ruler, Prithu, the originator of a previous cycle of humanity.

Piety and asceticism are the means by which man rises to the divine level, and the virtues of the holy man are essentially communicable: spiritual riches can be transmitted by sight and hearing. Hence the possibility of acquiring merit by invoking a saint, singing his praises, seeing or touching him; this explains the eagerness of an Indian crowd for *darshana*, which means, properly, *seeing* a notable religious personality.

Animals too are susceptible of being made into sacred beings; first and foremost the Cow, which has its own cult and mythology and which is the living expression of the idea of *ahimsa*, or non-violence, and also the ideas of food and of purity; Gandhi placed veneration for the cow in the foreground of his ideology. Next in importance is the Snake, whose cult is saturated with folklore and takes a number of different forms. Various other animals play a large part in Hindu mythology and figure in the imagery of divine attributes, the mounts on which the gods travel from place to place, and so on. There are also divine plants and trees

representing one sacred reality or another, such as the lotus, the *tulasi*, which is dedicated to Vishnu, and the *bilva*, dedicated to Shiva. The process extends to inanimate things, for example the *shulagrama*, a kind of stone, which is one of the Vishnuite symbols. Water is of supreme importance—the ocean; the Ganges, holiest of rivers; the legendary Sarasvati; even meres and fords (*tirthas*), which provide a focus for local beliefs and a destination for pilgrimages. And the weapons, musical instruments, and other objects the use of which is attributed to the gods are endowed with divine status.

Significance of the Gods

Of course the gods are mighty beings and enjoy superhuman powers; but they are subject nonetheless to the law of *karman* (p. 64) and suffer death and decay; they are born, we are sometimes told, by "manifestation." Myth, which makes unbridled use of personification and creates a whole décor modeled on human customs and situations, is something that springs from profound psychological roots and obeys a perspective of its own. In classical Hinduism, moreover, as distinct from what went on in Vedic times, myth is almost always dissociated from ritual procedure and moves in its own way, independently. At the same time, however, there is an undeniable tendency to seek harmony and an overriding unity; many texts, even those that display the most exuberant complexity of mythological storytelling, contain passages here and there that give us to understand that one god is not fundamentally distinct from another, that praise rendered in

one way could equally well be rendered in a different way, and even that the forms of the gods and their adornments, while possessing a symbolic value designed as a prop to understanding, are really of small importance; some of the Vedanta writers relegate them to the realm of *maya* (p. 58). It is typical of the Indian worshiper to concentrate on an *ishtadevata*, or "chosen deity," whom he invokes in his private devotions, without thereby implying any devaluation of other conceptions of the divine.

The Supreme Godhead

Indians have often recognized an *Ishvara*, or "Lord," beyond the world of the gods; the terms *purusha* ("being") and *bhagavant* ("blessed") are also used in this connection. It is difficult to date the emergence of this concept; its first appearance in literature is in the so-called Middle Upanishads, which may have been composed in the fifth or fourth centuries B.C.; it implies something radically different from the other divine names. But we cannot identify it with our notion of a personal God unless at the same time we underline certain differences. In the first place, it retains a close relationship to one or another of the gods of mythology, Vishnu, Shiva, Krishna, or Rama; in the more rigorous conceptions of Vedanta (p. 27) and the school of Shankara, Ishvara is a "qualified *brahman*," that is to say an impersonal Absolute that, on a plane lower than the transcendental, is endowed with qualities (*saguna*) and thus appears as a personal God. In fact, outside this school as well as in it, the idea of Ishvara is never completely dissociated from that of the neuter *brahman*. The *Bhagavata* (p. 23) teaches, "This form which has

no beginning, the primordial *brahman*, pure light, pure existence, without qualities, without change, without attributes, without desire—you yourself are that, you are Vishnu in person, the torch that is the light of the microcosm."

At once immanent and transcendent, God as conceived by Hinduism retains vestiges of an earlier pantheism. A text such as the *Arthapancaka* of Lokacharya Pillai (thirteenth century) depicts God as being five-fold: the divine person enthroned in paradise; "extended" being (see the theory of *vyuhas*); the being who comes down to the earth (theory of *avataras*, p. 44); the "inner policeman" (a carryover from the ancient *atman*); and lastly the physical image, the cult-object. These five states are simply juxtaposed more often than combined into a single composite conception. Tagore's *jivandevata* is at once God and a transcendent double of the self.

But if the path of philosophical reason led only slowly and with difficulty to this conception of God, the poets reached it directly, by intuition; they often sing the praise of the Supreme Being and are perhaps at their most convincing when they seek him by successive negations, following the procedure by which the Absolute is defined in the Upanishads. Harichand, a Hindi poet of the eighteenth century, writes as follows: "He is to be found neither in knowledge nor in thought; nor in *karman* or caste or the laws; . . . nor in words and disputation; nor in religious controversy; nor in temples and worship; nor in the sound of the priest's bell. Let Harichand tell you: God is involved in us, and we in Him only by the bond of love." In India, the divine and the perception of it are much more a matter of direct experience than of intellectual striving.

Some Indian systems of thought are atheistic, in the sense that they reject any conception of the Supreme Being as a personal God; at the same time they do accept (as we find, for instance, in the pristine form of Sankhya and in Mimamsa, p. 27) some of the simpler beliefs, such as that in transitory deities. As for the materialists or *Nastikas* (the name means "those for whom nothing is") they deny the reality of everything outside the sensible and material category, and their prestige is comparatively small. At least, the ancient literature avoids mentioning them and the texts in which their doctrine is said to have been recorded have all disappeared, no doubt in consequence of the disfavor with which it was regarded.

4 / PHILOSOPHY

General Remarks

The problem of the divine takes us into the heart of Indian speculative thought. The supreme God is not necessarily the Creator, or, if he is (as in the case of Brahman), his creative act remains something abstract; the original impulse, nothing more. Why did he create? The answer often given is that it was an act of play, *lila*, taking effect through *maya*, the principle of change through which phenomena are brought forth out of primordial simplicity.

Indian cosmology usually postulates, as the starting point of creation, *prakriti*, or primitive matter (literally "pre-action"; sometimes the term used is *pradhana*, "pre-datum," that which is "given" in advance). *Prakriti* is a material continuum filling all space and bearing in itself the three factors called *gunas* ("qualities" or "substances"): *sattva* the good, luminous principle, *rajas*, the impure principle, mingled with

affectivity, and *tamas*, the principle of darkness[1]; the phenomenal world, both physical and psychological, being built up of different combinations of these factors. From this mixture are born the five original elements (ether, air, fire, water, earth) constituting what is known as "the egg of Brahman," namely the universe. Deposited as Hiranyagarbha in the cosmic waters, the hatching of this egg produces Brahman, who begets the creation and in particular the human race; according to another tradition Brahman leaves the begetting to his ten "spiritual sons," the Prajapatis. This is the only point at which philosophy and mythology coincide. Needless to say, there are doctrines from which *prakriti* is omitted and in which Brahman is the first principle. In the *Lingapurana* he expresses himself as follows: "Consciousness was made by me and so was ego-awareness in its three forms, which arises from consciousness; from thence also come the five subtle elements, the mind and the corporeal senses, ether and the other essences and all that issues from them; I created the whole of this by my playing."

The Universe

The cosmic egg (*brahmanda*) contains in its upper half seven celestial layers or stories, beyond which there is nothing but empty space; the topmost of these is the dwelling place of Reality, or *brahman* (neuter). The bottom half contains seven subterranean stories, the *patala,* which is the home of

[1] The definition of the *gunas* varies a good deal. Sometimes, for instance, *rajas* is active, expansion, lightness, *tamas* is passive or inert, contraction, heaviness, and *sattva* is vibration, or equilibrium between the other two.—Tr.

the Nagas and other fabulous beings; in the lowest part of the patala is hell, properly called *naraka,* the place of punishment, itself often divided into seven stories or a multiple of seven.

Earth is between the two, a sort of disk at the center of which is the far-famed Mount Meru, the world's pivot "shining like the morning sun or a smokeless fire" (*Padma-Purana*). Round Meru and corresponding to the four cardinal points are four "island continents" (*dvipa*). These details are clearly taken from ordinary life; the Himalayas are the source of them; the subsequent treatises on astronomy preserved what they could of this primitive geography. But in the Puranas and after them, the speculative imagination introduced seven concentric oceans and islands arranged round Mount Meru; an impassable mountain range goes all round the edge of the earth's surface. In the earlier of these two conceptions, Jambudvipa, the "Isle of the Rose-apple Tree," lies to the south of Meru; in the second it has Meru as its center and is the inhabited part of the earth (or, according to some texts, it represents India); it includes six mountain chains running from east to west and separating seven river basins; outside this area lies the geography of the known world, which however is enriched with a number of fanciful features.

The Ages of the World

When cosmology acquired depth in space, in the manner described, it simultaneously acquired depth in time. The theory of *kalpas,* or cosmic ages, appears not to have been current in the Vedic period; it comes later. Each *kalpa* is

imagined to coincide with the lifespan of a world, from creation to dissolution, this duration being that of a day in the life of Brahman. The *kalpa* contains a thousand "great ages," each of which in its turn contains four "lesser ages," or *yugas*: the first of the four being a perfect or golden age, and the last the *kali-yuga*, or evil age, in which we are living now and which has been going on since a date corresponding to 3102 B.C. The *kali-yuga* is characterized by the loss of three-quarters of the *dharma* that existed in the golden age, the result being the wars, plagues, vices, and premature deaths that we see around us. The development curve of present-day humanity, as of past and future humanities, is an evolutionary retrogression leading to an "intermediate dissolution" (fire followed by flood); at the end of time will come the "great dissolution" (*maha-pralaya*), coinciding with the end of the life of Brahman. The world will be reintegrated into Brahman by involution and will remain in that state until the hatching of a new cosmic egg. In the words of the *Bhagavata*, "When the world is destroyed between two brahmic periods and the material elements are absorbed once more by the primitive element, then dost thou (Vishnu) remain alone, under the name of Shesha."

According to another way of representing history,[2] every

[2] This illuminates sharply the difference between Western and Eastern notions of time, and hence of chronology and history. In the West, time is linear, continuous, and inorganic, and chronology is scientific. In the East, time is rhythmical and resembles an organic process; the conception of chronology allows for the periodical annihilation of both time and chronology. The difference between the two mentalities is that one bases its attitude toward the world on sense impressions and rational inference; the other, on metaphysical intuition, a faculty that has lost credit in the West and is indeed atrophied, or at least deeply buried, in many Westerners.—TR.

kalpa is divided into fourteen equal periods, which are named after Manu, who governs them; these are the Manvantaras, or "periods of Manu," each of which is separated from the next by a long interregnum. Present-day humanity is governed by the seventh Manu, Vaivasvata, the son of the solar god Vivasvant.

Soul and Body

The equivalent of what we think of as the soul is denoted by the word *atman*, the original meaning of which was the "vital breath" and the subsequent meaning of which is the Self. *Atman* is more comprehensive than soul; it includes consciousness and, in some contexts, sensations; sense impressions remain imprinted on it from reincarnation to reincarnation, such as for instance the image of the tiny human figure that persists in the eye or heart and that is a kind of symbol for the *atman*. The *atman* is far from being as abruptly differentiated from the body as is the soul in our own conception of the matter; a continuous gradation, without difference of kind, leads from material to psychic processes, the latter being dominated by *manas*, an internal sense controlling the mental faculties. In some branches of Hindu philosophy, souls, under the name of *jiva*, "vital principle," are portrayed as monads having neither origin nor ending, abstract and invariant entities now active and now inert; this is the conception put forward in the so-called atheistic philosophies. Theistic systems are at special pains to describe the states through which souls pass: those still in bondage to *samsara* (p. 66) are distinguished from those that are "delivered" and

therefore eternal, that is to say exempted henceforth by their nature from further reincarnation.

A distinction is also made between the gross body, which is connected with the soul by means of *prana*, or "breath," and the invisible subtle body, which includes the subtle organs of the senses, the inner sense already mentioned, and also, according to some authorities, the energies on which the organic functions depend. It is this subtle body that, at death, accompanies the soul after the destruction of the gross body and continues to support the tendencies arising from *karman*.

At the moment of death all the faculties are withdrawn into the soul, which escapes from the body by one of the nine orifices. But the doctrines differ as to what happens next.

The Next World

In popular belief the dominant conception is that the soul appears before the god Yama for judgment. If the balance of its deeds is to its credit it goes to paradise by following the sunbeams, the "road of the gods." Paradise is pictured as a place of sensuous pleasures, situated variously in the sky or among the gods at the summit of Mount Meru, or in a heaven called Vaikuntha, which is sometimes specifically conceived as a spiritual abode. If the balance is on the debit side the soul is dragged off to hell; vivid descriptions are given of the various punishments, which are graded according to the gravity of the soul's offenses. But neither heaven nor, more especially, hell is envisaged as being eternal, at any rate in most theories. The *Markandeya-Purana* gives an account of the brief visit to hell paid by King Vipash-

cit, following a peccadillo; he begs that salvation be extended to the damned, and his request is granted. As a rule the soul is introduced into a new body after a certain length of time and thus lives again on earth. This return to earthly life is made by way of the rain that makes the plants grow; from these plants the soul is transferred into the creatures that feed on them and thus into the sperm from which the new life is to begin. While a soul is awaiting its new fate it is known as a *preta* and is reduced to the status of a wandering ghost; there is another kind of disembodied soul, the *pitars*, or "shades," whose relations with the living are pleasing and helpful.

The Theory of Karman

Karman, "action," became the central dogma of the Hindu religion. It belongs to a higher and in a sense more scientific plane than the ideas so far described, and is sometimes difficult to reconcile with them. It is an "unseen, unheard" force, one which acts on the soul (or the subtle body) and forces it to undergo rebirth in a human animal condition determined by past actions. Every action and every intention imprints on the inner personality an effect that matures either in this life or, more frequently, in a future one, and that constitutes the destiny of the individual. In theistic systems it is the Lord who unleashes the power of *karman*; in other systems it is said to function automatically. The law of *karman* affects all living things, including the gods; it operates remorselessly, the deed follows the doer and finds him out infallibly "as the calf finds its dam in a herd of a thousand cows"

(*Vishnu-smriti*). "We are what we have done, we shall be what we are doing or shall do." Is this out-and-out predestination? In one sense yes, in that *karman* is the product of past actions; but insofar as it is a future eventuality it depends to some extent on human effort, which many Hindu writers set up against blind destiny. Determinism and freedom are combined in *karman*. The theory, which at once lays down destiny as an absolute law yet explains its causes, penetrated the Indian mentality profoundly and provided the framework of Indian psychology. In practice one of its effects has often been to cause the individual to renounce action in order to escape its consequences; hence the emergence of an ethic of non-activity, an ethic that in different doctrinal schools makes different degrees of concession to the demands of action and to the will to live.

The word *karman* taken in this sense appears as early as the *Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad* but it is in classical Vedanta that the theory is fully worked out. Some systems, such as Shaivasiddhanta, set up a complete scale of retribution: let us suppose (they say) that a soul has a thousand past good deeds on one side of the account and fifteen hundred evil ones on the other. During its present life it cancels out fifty of each; it then goes down to hell and expiates eight hundred of the evil deeds, is reborn into human life, cancels six hundred of the nine hundred and fifty remaining good deeds and five hundred evil ones, thus leaving three hundred and fifty good and one hundred and fifty evil deeds still to be worked off. The initial numbers (one thousand, and one thousand five hundred) are one's basic *karman*, one's working capital, so to speak; the intermediate numbers represent the ensuing

transactions; the balance (three hundred and fifty and one hundred and fifty) is the state of *karman* resulting from them.

Samsara

To be rendered plausible *karman* had to be given a background, and so there was created the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, a transmigration lasting an indefinite length of time; a single lifetime would not have been long enough for the endless repercussions of *karman*. Thus according to popular belief this present life is regarded as merely one of the lives that the individual goes through in the course of an indefinitely long series of existences governed by *karman;* it is a single "wave in the river of *samsara*," the latter word meaning the "general flow" of living creatures. *Samsara* is usually likened to a wheel endlessly turning; sometimes to the rocking of a seesaw or to a series of waves. The mechanism is simple: the soul comes back to earth with a residue of *karman* that affects it and determines the precise conditions in which the individual will undergo his next reincarnation ("in whatever state of mind one performs an action, one reaps the harvest of that action in a body corresponding to the state of mind," say the Laws of Manu). In time thinkers came to lay down a minute classification of actions and the condition begotten by them. Bad conditions as a rule, because actions tend more often to pervert the good than to promote it, and because action produces of its very nature a potential for evil. Hence what has been called Indian pessimism, the extent of which, however, has been exaggerated.

For in the long run the very accumulation of rebirths in animal or vegetable form sets up an ascending curve, because merit acquired in the process raises the level and thus shortens the cycle. Writers on the subject say that only a few privileged individuals remember their previous incarnations.

The word *samsara*, which, as can be seen, is equivalent to metempsychosis or, more exactly, metensomatosis, first appears in the early Upanishads, but no one can say from what elements the doctrine was elaborated and whether these were of Indian or alien origin. Its resemblances to Pythagoreanism are inconclusive, and there are sufficient passages in the Vedas to account for the genesis of *samsara* without postulating any contribution from outside.

The conditions under which reincarnation takes place, and which are often picturesquely described, involve an explicit relationship between the fault committed and the condition imposed as a result—sometimes on the basis of a childish symbolism or even a pun, a stealer of oil being reborn as a scurf (because another name for scurf is "oil-drinker"), whereas a jewel thief has the luck to be reborn as a goldsmith. In the systematic expositions that occur in the later literature the scheme is as follows: the soul will be granted a human body after undergoing 84 *lakshas* of preliminary reincarnations (1 *laksha* = 100,000 times); 20 *lakshas* as a plant, 9 as an aquatic creature, 11 as an insect, 10 as a bird, 30 as some kind of cattle, 4 as a monkey; it must then undergo 2 *lakshas* of rebirths in the various estates of man, from the lowest to the highest, before it is liberated from *samsara*.

Pathways to Deliverance

The essential object of religion, outweighing any advantages in earthly life and even the joys of paradise, is to lead to deliverance. If, in the cosmological perspective, man as an individual is reduced to insignificance by the endless series of actions and their effects, the prospect of deliverance reinvests him with full importance.

What are the paths that lead to deliverance? They are as many as the systems of thought in which they are described. There is the path of action: ritual and other observance, pilgrimages, private prayer; this is an extension of Vedic teaching, yet it came in time to be regarded as the lower path, at least insofar as it was concerned with outward worship. A higher form of it was that offered by asceticism. Another form of the path of action was the path of initiation, by which the adepts of certain sects were able to obtain the necessary spiritual talisman, as it were; thus the Tantric student sought "consecration," the Lingayats (p. 113) celebrated their eightfold sacrament, and the Vallabhacaryas (p. 121) performed their sacred dance.

There is also the path of knowledge, an inheritance from the Upanishads: a conviction, deliberately established in the mind, that the individual soul and the absolute are essentially identical. But there are also more precise methods of progressing toward deliverance, methods without which the individual is in danger of going astray and getting nowhere. These methods, composed of heterogeneous elements and widely practiced in a fragmentary form from very early times, were soon collected and systematized under the name of Yoga.

The word *Yoga* acquired various diluted meanings in the course of history and, in the neo-Hinduism of our own day, has come to mean any method of inducing mystical experience. But what it originally meant was a very definite technique directly inherited, it seems, from certain physiological and spiritual conceptions, of which traces are to be found in the Veda, but which may also have converged with other, less learned conceptions, of shamanistic origin, or simply with elementary practices aimed at producing *tapas*, the spiritual and physical "heat" or "fire" that can be produced by asceticism. In any case and whatever its ingredients may have been, Yoga is a typically Indian phenomenon and certainly one of the most original that the Indian doctrines have to offer us.

Yoga

The word means "union" (and also, incidentally, "rule" or "canon"). The technique's point of departure is a physiological one: the control of respiration, and especially a lengthening of the pause between inspiration and expiration (*pranayama*). This exercise is accompanied by a suitable psychological and moral regimen composed both of negative and positive rules (*yama* and *niyama*). The underlying philosophy is a conception of breath as a manifestation of the universal soul. A logical consequence of this conception is the subject's voluntary withdrawal of his powers of sensation and action. This in turn leads to exercises in concentration in which the subject fixes his attention either on some part of his own body or on an external point. He meditates for long

periods, holding in his mind the image of some object as if that object were physically present. In the last and highest stage he passes into a semi-ecstatic condition in which the subject-object relationship disappears; thought and the object of thought are integrated, and the subject attains the fusion that is the very aim of Yoga; this state is called *samadhi*, "reintegration."

Besides pursuing simple hygienic and therapeutic objectives, Yoga, when carried to extremes, is applied to the acquisition of supernormal physical powers; finally and above all, to absolute mystical attainment, perfect transcendental union. It is a conscious, voluntary technique the aim of which is to dominate all the inferior planes of existence in a human being by concentrating the energies of the vegetative nervous system. Of course it represents under both these heads, the supernormal and the mystical, an arduous developmental path, suited only to a spiritual minority and not easily communicated. Adopted and conveyed by Buddhism, its methods rapidly spread to Tibet and to the Far East.

Tantrism

Tantrism, the "religion" of the Tantras (p. 25), is an autonomous development of Yoga, taking as its point of departure some of the fundamental Yogic formulations in physiology and cosmogony. The "right-hand path" (*dakshinacara*) is based on the conception of six centers (*chakras*) or knots of subtle energy situated inside the body and depicted graphically as six lotuses; they are connected by subtle arteries and culminate in a seventh center in the upper part of the

cranium; the lowest center, at the base of the trunk, is held to be the seat of the Goddess, who is represented in the form of a coiled serpent (*kundalini*) but who is actually a symbol of the cosmic force of the unconscious; the highest center is the throne of Shiva. The method used by Tantrism is based on breath control of the Yogic type, and consists of rousing the snake from its sleep and causing it to rise from center to center, untying the knots (opening the valves, as it were) one by one, till it reaches the supreme center where the *union mystica* (*brahmabhuya*, "identification with Brahman") takes place in an atmosphere of unutterable bliss, accompanied by the production of "ambrosia"; the process is thus poetically described in a Tantric text (*Description of the Six Circles*):

> Having drunk the surpassing nectar that emanates from Shiva the Supreme, the great fountainhead of eternal felicity, Kundalini the Beautiful returns by way of the Kula [the *brahman* orifice that is supposed to exist at the top of the cranium] into the lowest center. The *yogi*, calm and steadfast in mind, will pour libations to the gods enclosed in the World Egg, using for this purpose the stream of heavenly nectar that he has tasted, thanks to the teachings of Yoga.

Thus the operation ends in a kind of sacrifice to the cosmos. It belongs to the type of experience known as *Laya-yoga*, the Yoga of "merging" or "re-absorption." It is of course legitimate to regard it as a sublimation of the sexual act.

By contrast, the "left-hand path" (*vamacara*) of Tantrism borrows the methods of Yoga only in order to reject them. Progress toward deliverance is made not by physical

and moral self-restraint but by giving free rein, provisionally at least, to sensation and moreover to passion; erotic stimulation is employed in an individual or group setting to the end that passion may be appreciated for the empty thing it is. Its tyranny is said to be thus shaken off and by this means the "I" is destroyed, since the foundation of the "I" is the sum of the individual's desires; the technique is a kind of religious homeopathy based on magic. Naturally this left-handed path is dangerous for the common run of people and is indicated only for men of a higher type, known as "heroes," who have undergone the necessary preparation.

Bhakti

Another path of deliverance, excluded from the strict Yoga but not from Tantric Yoga, is *bhakti*. Literally, the word means "participation," and it designates participation in the divine reality by way of the affections, emotional devotion manifested as a passionate desire for union with the Lord, self-abandonment (*prapatti*) to the divine will, submissive service (*seva*) to the Lord and to the teachers who make access to him easier. *Bhakti* is a simpler way of approaching God than the others so far described, though these are in theory open to all, without special preparation. It is a spontaneous demonstration of religious feeling. Although it exists potentially in certain of the Vedic hymns, its main literary antecedents are in the Upanishads of the middle period and the *Bhagavad-Gita* (p. 23), where however it is still mingled with other, more intellectual values. Its real flowering comes later, in the vernacular songs of a number of sects and in a

Krishnaite treatise of considerable importance, the *Bhagavata-purana* (p. 24); it became an inseparable part of Hinduism. It is expressed in the eloquent message of the *Gita*: "Whoever has Me in mind in all his actions, and sees in Me his highest goal, and gives up his life to Me—he it is who finds Me." In the Tamil poet Appar we see *bhakti* ousting every other form of worship: "To what end do men chant the Vedas? listen to The Treatises? keep the moral law day by day? learn one of the *Angas*, or all six? To carry the Lord in one's own heart is the only way of salvation." Some doctrines maintain that the Lord recompenses this outpouring of emotion by a dispensation of grace (*prasada*) to his elect. *Bhakti* created in the image of the *bhagavant*, the Lord, a new type of human being, the *bhakta*, or saint, the Lord's herald, whose radiant virtue affects all who come near him; the poet Tulsidas, for example, creates the figure of Bharata, Rama's brother, who is *bhakti* personified and who by the love he bears the Lord is almost the Lord's equal.

In late Hinduism, and particularly among the Vishnuites of Bengal, there arose a form of *bhakti* quite as highly elaborated as any of the other ways to deliverance. Feelings, states of soul, concomitant and subsidiary states, were analyzed and subdivided in imitation of the learned theories that had been built up to explain the nature of poetry and drama.[3] At the same time a special eroticism was developed, different in

[3] And which have a depth, precision, and austerity entitling them to be set beside their counterparts in the West. Even a casual reading reveals curious parallels with the classical literary doctrine of Aristotle, Horace, Quintilian, and Longinus—and T. E. Hulme! See A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva*, where some of the theories are set out, though the parallels are not drawn.—Tr.

nature and purpose from that of Tantrism, but equally intense and no less perilous.

What Is Deliverance?

Deliverance (*moksha, mukti,* and several other words) is defined first and foremost (as are all the great Indian values) in negative terms: it consists of escaping from the bonds of *karman*, of freedom from the necessity for rebirth. Deliverance is attained when *karman* comes to rest, as the potter's wheel ceases to move when there is no longer an external force driving it.

Deliverance is won in some cases step by step and in others at a single stroke. According to some schools it takes place only at death, but most thinkers allow the possibility that a man can be "delivered-in-life" (*jivanmukta*), in which case he is a privileged being, a saint in some sort, subject only to the inescapable effects of such *karman* as he has accumulated in the past. He has no desires, nothing is real for him any more; everything on the practical plane has become meaningless and superfluous. In some texts he is portrayed as resembling a child or one possessed, singing and dancing like Shiva. The *Wave of Bliss*, a poem attributed to Shankara, describes him in these words: "Continuously rejoicing in Deliverance, he dives again and again into that lake of inner beatitude that is the supreme reality of Shiva."

The atheistic doctrines, such as the primitive Sankhya, depict the delivered person as being after his death (which in his case is of course the last death to be undergone) someone whose thought is directed toward no object and causes

no effect; in other words he is unconscious. According to the account given by theistic doctrines, he either (as in Yoga and Nyaya) remains passive, knowing and willing nothing, or else, as is more usual, he is united with God in a relationship that allows of different degrees in different cases, from companionship to complete incorporation. This state generates a beatitude that is expressed on occasion by paradisal images of a sort one would not have expected to encounter in so abstract a zone of thought. Some of the *bhakti* doctrines exhibit this phenomenon.

Finally, in doctrines that present the Absolute as impersonal, as does the Vedanta of the school of Shankara, deliverance is represented as union with the neuter *brahman* (p. 12) and amounts in consequence to complete loss of personality—"like a river flowing into the sea." But this conception was gradually contaminated by one in which deliverance connoted some survival of activity. It is likely that the Buddhist and Jainist doctrine of nirvana played a part in shaping some of the Brahmanic doctrines of deliverance.

Generally speaking, deliverance according to Indian doctrine is always individual, never collective.

5 / MISCELLANEOUS RITES AND PRACTICES

General

Ritual, in the strict, priestly sense of the term, loses some of its importance after the Vedic period, but outward worship independent of a standard liturgy makes a corresponding gain. The old-time sacrifice (p. 13) is hardly ever carried out except on behalf of rich donors, such as princes or high officials. Prayer begins parting company with ritual and starts to live an independent life, even if it does not become more spontaneous than before. Symbolism and mental adoration begin taking the place of the old direct, concrete worship. The only thing that survives almost intact is private ritual, notably the "sacraments" (p. 17). Important innovations are made by Tantrism (p. 70), which as far as ritual is concerned represents something of a revolution in Hindu religion.

Prayer

The power of prayer lies in the form rather than the meaning of the *mantra* (sacred formula) by means of which prayer is expressed, and still more in the precise way in which this *mantra* is uttered, the concentration of mind accompanying it, and the external conditions that occasion its use (initiation, expiation, execration, binding by oath, and so on). The practice of *japa* makes its appearance and becomes universally established. The word means "murmuring"; it stands for a spoken, whispered, or mental recitation the efficacy of which increases by geometrical progression (Laws of Manu: "An offering of whispered prayers is ten times more effective than a sacrifice carried out according to the prescriptions of the Veda; an inaudible prayer, a hundred times more; and a mental prayer, a thousand times.") The *mantra* is often extended into a long litany, a single word or phrase being repeated a large number of times; thus the *Mahanirvana*, a Tantric text, describes a recitation to Brahman composed of thirty-two thousand repetitions. Stories are also recited, such as the seven hundred verses of the *Chandi-Mahatmya*, or "Glorification of the Goddess" (seventh century?), which is recited daily in the temples of Durga (p. 50) and which is very widely known in northern India. "To sing of my exploits [says the Goddess herself] rescues from reincarnation; to tell the tale of my combats and the destruction of treacherous demons wipes out transgressions and confers the blessings of health." Recitation therefore brings the same benefits as were formerly contingent on magic or sacrifice.

Means are described for "vivifying" the formula, that is

to say converting it from the inert to the active state. The basic *mantra* is the sacred syllable *om*, which was the subject of much philosophical discussion; *om* is "the *brahman* of three letters (*a-u-m*)," a "secret Veda." Various consecrated objects are inscribed with single letters, each of which has its own symbolic value. Tantrism makes use of more or less arbitrarily chosen syllables called *bija*, or "seeds," because they contain in the germinal state the physical form of the god or, as is sometimes maintained, because they constitute the germ of realization—the deeper meaning of realization being known only to initiates. *Nyasas*, or "impositions," another device of Tantric provenance, are methods that consist of taking a *bija*, or written formula, in the fingers and placing it on some part of the body, so as to evoke and absorb the divine power embodied in the symbol. *Yantras* are a kind of diagram, such as series of triangles or circles surrounded by curves representing lotus petals, the whole being enclosed in a frame. The most efficacious *yantra*, the *Shriyantra*, consists of a central point (*bindu*) surrounded by petals and another, concentric, series of sixteen petals, and finally three circles or squares, which form the frame, the whole being a representation of the undifferentiated *brahman* (p. 12) that unfolds the multiple manifestations of the cosmos from the *bindu*. The divine image supposedly projected in the *yantra* is sometimes held to be more powerful than a realistic statue of the god; these, for example, are the terms in which a devotee visualizes the god Ganesha with the aid of a network of hexagons:

> On an undulating surface whose boundaries form a square, and which is filled from within with the warmth of the rising sun and the light of the moon, . . . under a

> huge celestial tree to which all the seasons pay court simultaneously and whose fruits are gems, whose flowers are diamonds and whose branches are of coral—there he sits on a painted lotus which is his throne, the ends of the legs of which are lions' heads, and which glows resplendently under three hexagons; he has an elephant's head with a single tusk, a great belly, and ten arms; he is reddish in color . . . (*Prapancasara-Tantra*).

Finally, the *mudras*, or "seals," are gestures of the hands and different ways of interlacing the fingers, each of them having a precise meaning. The *mudras* have given rise to much occult philosophy. A sort of comparative grammar of the *mudras* could be derived from the study of Brahmanic and Buddhistic Tantrism in India and outside it, going as far afield as Bali, where a whole corpus of *mudras* was developed, partly under Hindu influence.

Images and Image-Worship

Although images (idols) were formally condemned by some theologians, the worship of images plays an enormous part in the history of Hinduism. This is idolatry, and there is no getting round the fact; nevertheless certain distinctions must be carefully drawn. For many and perhaps indeed most worshipers, an image is simply a material support for adoration, an aid to worship just like descriptive prayer or any of the other external elements of the devotional practice. Historically speaking, the use of images in worship is post-Vedic, although certain descriptions in the Vedic hymns seem to point to their existence. Patanjali, in the second century B.C., refers to the sale of figurines of Shiva, Skanda, and Vishakha by the Maurya kings.

Images are constructed acording to canons minutely laid down in the relevant Treatises, attention being paid to the individual attitudes, attributes, colorings, and so on of each deity. When the image is installed in the temple a ceremony of consecration is carried out, with curious rites such as "starting the breath" and "opening the eyes." Adoration, called *puja*, is the dominant external form, the form par excellence of Hindu religious practice. In a series of operations, partly based on Vedic models (the enthronement of the "*soma* king," for example), the image is anointed, dressed, adorned, and perfumed; food and drink are given it, flowers are placed and lights waved about it. Some kinds of *puja* demand yet more solemn ceremonies, on the lines of royal etiquette. From time to time the image is carried out of the temple precincts, as in the processions, or *yatras*, in which the god is installed in a chariot of monumental proportions and immersed in some sacred river or lake. In Bengal, in particular, these *yatras* are enriched by performances of popular melodramas on subjects drawn from the Epic, the legend of Chandi (p. 50), and the like. Tradition has it that, in the celebrated *yatra* of Vishnu the World-Ruler at Puri (Orissa), devout fanatics used to let themselves be crushed to death by the wheels of the chariot (called by travelers in the old days the Juggernaut chariot, from Jagannatha, "Ruler of the World"); a passage in the *Vishnudharmottara* (eighth century?) describes one of these processions as follows: "When the day comes they take a small idol, resembling the figure in the temple, and fasten it inside a miniature edifice with turrets, beautiful to see and covered with various fabrics, mounted on a chariot decorated with gems, garlands, ori-

flammes, and little bells. This is paraded through the town, drawn either by horses or by a team of men. An archer, richly dressed, goes in front; other men throw flowers and wreaths; panegyrists and priests uttering benedictions head the procession, followed by the king, while music accompanies the whole."

The literature of Tantrism describes an elaborate form of *puja*, dedicated to Durga and comprising among other things a "purification of the elements" (*bhutashuddhi*). This simulates externally the awakening of the *kundalini* (p. 70); the celebrant successively amalgamates with one another the five elements of which his body is composed (ether, air, fire, water, earth), imitating the resolution of the body into the *prima materia*, the primordial undifferentiated substance.

On a higher plane than the use of idols or geometrical symbols is the practice of meditation without material adjuncts, the aim being to "bring into existence" the immaterial figure of the godhead and make it as vivid and real as a material symbol. This form of praise, which is considered more valuable than any external act, received its highest development at the hands of Tantrism but is found in use to some extent in every period. Its antecedents are the Vedic practice of ritual silence and certain other ancient procedures, such as the "offering of breath," which is described in the Upanishads.

The Temple

The Treatises describe in great detail the building of temples, from the little village shrine with its crude statuettes

to the temple-cities whose extensive boundary-walls, pierced by monumental gates (*gopuras*), enclose complex buildings, inner courtyards, hypostyles, and pools for ceremonial bathing; sometimes even monasteries, schools, and hospitals, in addition to small secular buildings. The choice of site is determined by astrology and divination. Services are not collective or held at fixed times; the staple of worship is *puja* (p. 80) and certain oblations, *soma* (p. 14) being replaced in the latter by *ghrita* or *ghi*, the clarified butter that feeds the sacred flame in the temple lamp and the use of which was already known in Vedic times. The faithful sometimes assemble in order to assist at a *puja*, at other times simply to meditate or to listen to an exposition of doctrine or to take part in chanting and recitation. The image is honored with gifts, notably flowers, perfumes, and fruit; the priest receives money offerings and gives visiting worshipers a little consecrated food, which they will share out with their kin. Offerings are made on a special altar to the shades of the departed. Other things used for offerings are leaves of *tulasi* and *ashoka* (among the Vishnuites), leaves of *bilva* (among the Shivaites), *kusha* grass, and Ganges water.

The Vedic practice of animal sacrifice is perpetuated in the worship of Kali (p. 50), particularly in Bengal. These sacrifices are mentioned from the time of the emperor Asoka on, and are the usual type of offering to the "village deities" (p. 49). Today the commonest victims are kids and cocks, but the literature speaks of various others and gives the outline of the ritual. Token sacrifices, with substitute victims, are allowed, however.

Some of the classical texts (the *Malati-Madhava* of Bhavabhuti, for example) make favorable reference to human sacrifice, a custom that infiltrated from the savage tribes that practiced it into the *shakta* sects (p. 114); while it is true that the Vedas mention it they concede to it no more than a theoretical value. Human sacrifice of a kind is recognizably the basis of a practice that was long held in honor but has been officially banned for the last hundred years, the institution of *sati*, the "voluntary" death of the widow, who leaps onto the pyre on which her husband's body is being burnt. This cruel ceremony is sometimes described as if it were a kind of marriage, and in some cases the victim is canonized as a local saint; commemorative steles to such victims are not unknown. The first literary mention of the custom is in the Epic, and the first inscriptions recording it in the sixth century A.D., but there are reasons for supposing that the sources of this written evidence lie in pre-Vedic times.

The temple, which belongs to whoever paid for its erection or to the community that occupies it, is in theory consecrated to a single deity; in practice, however, other deities sometimes have a chapel inside it or adjoining it. There is no ecclesiastical hierarchy, and the temple priest (*pujari*), who lives on the alms he receives, is often held in but small esteem; many Brahmans look down on the profession, and considerable use is made of little shrines that have no priest.

There are records in many periods of the presence of women—sacred dancers (*bayaderes*) and courtesans—who are attached to the temple and are known as *devadasis*,

"slaves of the god." This institution may go back to the times when the great temples of the south were built, about the ninth century, but the word is older.[1]

Finally, we must mention the cult of the *linga* (p. 48), a small column usually made of black stone, sometimes carved, sometimes plain, round which votive *puja* is carried out. In some of the southern temples there are long rows of these *lingas.*

Sacred Places

The founding of towns and villages, the planting of trees, and the making of artificial ponds are accompanied by religious ceremonies that include offerings and purificatory rites. The commonest of such holy places are *tirthas*, "fords"; others are lakes or pools, or river banks where access to the water is made easy by gently sloping flights of steps (*ghats*). All these are centers of mass devotion. Sacred above all other Indian rivers is the Ganges, "our mother Ganga," as she is called, the course of which is thought to be continguous to both heaven and hell. But any water, if suitably invoked, becomes a substitute for the Ganges and is equivalent to it.

Among holy cities seven are recognized as being in the first rank: Benares, Hardvar, Ujjain, Mathura, Ayodhya, Dvarka, and Kanjiveram; of these the holiest is Benares.

[1] Western observers, so often prone to take a rather "worthy" attitude toward the East, have turned up their noses at the institution of temple dancers and prostitutes. However, it sometimes happens in matters Indian that a self-indulgent, decadent surface conceals an uncompromising austerity. The real function of the *devadasi* is beautifully described in Oliver St. John Gogarty's reminiscences, *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street.*—Tr.

Religious life (not to mention a thriving secular existence) is concentrated along the stone steps and vast terraces that line the inward-curving bank of the Ganges at that point. At Hardvar, "the Gate of Hari," the Ganges debouches from the mountains. Prayag is the name of the confluence of the Yamuna (Jumna) above Allahabad. Puri, in Orissa, is the center of the worship of Vishnu. Various cults together are to be found in the temple cities of the south, Madura, Tanjore, and Sidambaram. The "Holy Land" of Krishnaism is Vrindavana and the surrounding region. Most of these centers and a number of others are places of pilgrimage; at certain times of year, and in certain years especially, they attract enormous numbers of the faithful and of sightseers. There is hardly a shrine of any importance that does not furnish the occasion for those gatherings, called *melas,* half fair, half religious demonstration, which are prominent among the major attractions offered by India to those who visit her. So many others have described them that we shall not attempt to do so here. It is enough to remark that if we gathered together all the references to pilgrimages that are scattered here and there in the literature, and traced the various itineraries in the light of modern knowledge, we should be on the way to drawing a spiritual map of India that would also illustrate certain important social facts, such as the circulation of goods and the paths followed by invasion and by peaceful penetration.

Feasts

Religious feasts are many and conform to a rigid calendar. The most important are the *Durga-Puja,* in October and

November, which lasts ten days and takes place partly in the temple and partly at home and is enlivened by processions; it is "the Bengal Christmas." An ancient text describes it thus: "On a wonderful chariot covered with fine linen, decked with bells and mirrors, the image of Durga is carried along while girls and women throw at it flowers, *durva* grass, unpolished rice, and water. The streets are besprinkled, doorways and houses are decorated. Trees are not felled and prisoners are set free." The *Shivaratri*, or "Day of Shiva," is celebrated every lunar month and more solemnly (*maha-shivaratri*) in January and February. The Dipavali or Divali is celebrated, as is indicated by its name ("row of lights") with the help of lamps set up both at sacred sites and elsewhere; popular rejoicing mounts high, and, formerly at least, there was a carnival, accompanied by various debauches and excesses. The births of Krishna and Rama are celebrated with feasts. The main Tamil festival is the *Pongal* (January and February), in which rice boiled in milk is offered up to various deities and there is a ceremonial aspersion of the cows, which are decorated with garlands for the occasion. The cattle are subsequently driven out in different directions to graze wherever they please, after which they are again herded together so that images of the gods, borne in procession, can be presented before them.

Fast days sometimes precede these feasts, some of which have been divested of their religious character and have become ordinary entertainments; this is the case with the Holi, the feast of spring and the god of love. A more important feature is the fact that some of these celebrations are echoes of mythological episodes; the feast of Durga commemorates the

Goddess' victory over the demon Mahisha; the *Divali* was originally the feast of the demon Bali, whom Indra, after defeating, authorized to return to earth once a year; the succession of ceremonies was intended to represent this visitation, and the bacchanalia that followed were the day of "Bali's dominion."

We cannot give an account of the details, which vary from region to region. But by way of a sample we should like to quote the picturesque description given by Sylvain Lévi (in Volume II of his work, *Le Népal*) of the *Durga-puja* as practiced in Nepal:

> The *Dasain* (literally "Ten Days") is no less popular in Nepal than in Bengal, where it is known as the *Dunga-puja*. . . . It lasts from the 1st to the 10th day of Ashvina (September-October) and comes round just at the time when, in Nepal, they begin harvesting the transplanted rice; its character is thus that of an agrarian festival. On the first day the Brahman priests sow barley in a consecrated place and water it with holy water; on the tenth day they pull up the young shoots and make them into little bunches, which they sell to the faithful in return for small offerings. Then and not until then does harvest begin in the whole valley. Nevertheless in principle Dasain represents a feat of arms, Durga's victory over her formidable opponent, the demon Mahisha (Asura). Consequently it is a military feast at the same time as an agricultural one. On the seventh day the king, escorted by his prime minister and some of the high functionaries, reviews a grand parade of the garrison; artillery salutes and volleys of rifle fire follow one another in uninterrupted succession. On the ninth day every regiment offers sacrifices to its standard, which is decorated with ribbons and flowers for the occasion; buffaloes with their horns painted and their necks hung with garlands are led

up to the regimental flag and decapitated with one blow from a *kukri*. Soldiers' sons aspiring to imitate their fathers do the same with he-goats. Every officer makes it his pride to supply at least one buffalo, in addition to those he sacrifices at home. At the Kot barracks, close to the palace, the king and his generals come as a rule to review the slaughter, to the sound of shots and music; from a hundred to a hundred and fifty buffaloes are killed one after the other, without leaving time to drag the carcasses away. Every temple in the country receives its share of the butchery. In addition, *Dasain* is the beginning of the administrative and domestic year; the annual arrangements for official employment are made on the first day of the festival. It is also the day for hiring or paying off servants. At the end of the ten days' holiday the king holds a great reception (*durbar*), and new state employees and old ones who have kept their posts go and present their respects, and their offerings, to their respective chiefs. Courts do not sit during *Dasain*, and prisoners in custody are brought out under open arrest.

Tantric Ritual

We have glanced several times at the practices of Tantrism (p. 70) some of which reinforce the normal practices of Hinduism, while others are deviations. Making its appearance at an indeterminate date during the first millennium of the Christian era, Tantrism gradually invaded the whole of religious life; it is not a new religion so much as a new coloring assumed by factors that belong to the common stock of Hinduism, and some of which are known to us only in their Tantristic form. The touch of this new influence is to be found in mythology, cosmogony, and above all in ritual. Much of its beginnings can be traced back to the Veda and

especially the Atharva-Veda, which can be regarded as a proto-Tantric hymnal. But its presence can of course be detected most clearly wherever it invaded and overlaid the customary practices of a cult, so as not only to modify their external form but also to change their inner meaning. This development takes us into the very nerve of Indian esotericism. An occult semantics was created the secrets of which were reserved for the adepts, or "heroes," and kept hidden from the profane, who form the bulk of the faithful; the latter call this "the twilight language." Words eventually assume an almost unlimited power; a word is at once the sign and the thing designated. Verbal formulae hold the key of superhuman realization and can bring about instantaneous deliverance. Tantrism is above all else a *mantra-shastra*, or "doctrine of the sacred formula." It is of course an initiatory religion, transmitted from master to disciple; initiation, which can take any of four forms from the slow to the instantaneous, is highly complex in some of its aspects, such as the "plenary aspersion," described in the *Mahanirvana*, which lasts from a single night to nine nights and is itself only the concluding stage of a series. And yet there is no consistent literature and no body of doctrine, but only didactic sequences recorded for the most part in works of late date, so that the task of tracing sources and influences is impossibly difficult.

The dominant contribution is the erotic, especially in the "left-hand" path, the principle being to exalt everything that the normal individual regards as illicit ("What is of low esteem in the world shall be exalted, and what the world exalts shall be held in low esteem," says the *Kularnava*); the next stage is to accumulate in oneself the potential inherent

in sexual energy. But these sexual rites are loaded with symbolism; human actions are a participation in the divine consciousness. Thus in the *pancatattva* ("the five entities") the woman whom the man approaches by means of the five *m*'s (*madya* "wine," *mamsa* "meat," *matsya* "fish," *mudra* "gestures," *maithuna* "carnal contact") is none other than the divine Energy incarnated in a human being. *Maithuna*, the most important element, is the consummation of a mystic marriage; it constitutes the "homage of the circle," so called because the participants are a circle of men and women. Woman can also be visualized, and treated, as a divine idol. There is a series of macabre rites, more or less magical in nature, which take place in the same setting as the "destruction of the 'I,'" namely in cemeteries. But there are also procedures proper to the "right-hand path," in which these darker elements have been purged and symbolic substitutes found for them.

Acts of Expiation

About the end of the Vedic period there sprung up a code of penitential procedures alongside the regular ritual. These consisted of special oblations or of the normal oblations diverted to a new end, and sometimes of ablutions and the repetition of prayers; their purpose was to avert the consequences of error, defilement, or misfortune. The code was augmented by the accretion of new practices: ascesis, fasting, and various mortifications. Expiatory gifts, good works, and the setting-up of religious foundations came gradually to be one of its leading elements, and eventually, in this realm as in

obscured the character of the expiation, which had previously been designed for each species of offense respectively. Even offenses that were intrinsically beyond expiation could be wiped out cheaply; and there were vicarious expiations, and expiations by means of which you compounded in advance for faults you intended to commit, and so on.

Sometimes these practices clash with legal punishment, either being added to the latter or substituted for it. Acts of expiation are ordered by a miniature court of justice presided over by a "chastisement" officer, who, in serious cases, also supervises the execution of the sentence. Besides dealings with religious offenses properly so called, whether venial or grave ("those that cause one to fall from one's caste"), the theory includes offenses against ethics, irregularities in social life, and even certain natural misfortunes and involuntary errors. Many of the "observances," or *vratas*, that occur in literary works, and that in some cases are developed with considerable symbolic complexity, are in fact expiatory practices; other *vratas* are merely petitions, prayers presented dynamically, in the form of religious dramas. All these expiatory practices have by now largely fallen into decay, especially the more extreme and striking ones.

Whereas, in the archaic period, evil lies in error, in classical Hinduism it resides rather in impurity: impure times, objects, and actions are duly catalogued and give rise to a science of casuistry.[2] To understand all this one must remem-

[2] It should be pointed out that the word is not used here in any pejorative sense. Casuistry, in both East and West, was originally developed because of a genuine need to resolve dilemmas. In the stricter forms of Christianity it is a mortal sin to abjure one's faith. But if, for example, you were captured by heathen pirates who tortured your wife and children before your eyes, and would stop only if you renounced

ber that the most trifling actions can have religious repercussions; religion is involved in, for instance, your choice of food and the way you eat it. It is well known that the concept of impurity, at any rate in theory, underlies the institution of caste.

Magic

Leading a marginal existence alongside the various forms of worship, magical practices appear to have altered but little since the Vedic period (p. 17), except that old formulae are replaced by new ones and that the specific links between magic and the old worship fell naturally away.

Who practices magic? The Brahman, notably the *purohita*, or "chaplain," and the ascetic; in the epic traditions gods and demons, aerial spirits (*vidyadhara*), and saints (*siddha*) practice it, just as ordinary mortals do; the king is a thaumaturge and possesses high magical powers. The substances used are countless; it seems that everything is classified according to whether or not it is charged with an irrational force, and whether this force is beneficial or harmful (usually it is harmful). A number of details in religious ritual, especially those concerned with names, must be explained in terms of a magical purpose.

Acts of magic involve the use of material "supports" like those of normal worship; some of these are borrowed from Tantrism. Thus considerable use is made of the *yantra* (p. 78) and of the *mandala*, or "circle," drawn on the ground to mark

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Christianity, would you be in mortal sin if you did so? Casuistry was initially the study of such difficult cases as this.—Tr.

out a protected space in which the operator can safely attract or repel invisible forces. We must also remember the widespread popularity of amulets.

The field to which magic can be applied is limitless. In literary works we often find love charms hybridized with rational aesthetic or medical procedures, but in fact every goal, every material advantage that the individual may aim at in his personal life, lies within the sphere of magical influence. There are special recipes for attaining political ends. In some texts on magic the fabulous element has clearly got the upper hand: there are directions for walking on burning coals, for traveling enormous distances without fatigue, and for manufacturing substances that allow some illusion or other to be created. In these cases magic has degenerated into the craft of the "net of Indra" (the art of the illusionist or conjuror).

At one epoch or another every form of divination seems to have been practiced: the astrology of natural events; personal astrology (the casting of horoscopes, the literature of which shows much borrowing from Greek and later from Arabic sources); the interpretation of dreams, geomancy, the study of physiognomy, and various other forms of pretended divination. The village astrologer is a person of consequence, and it is a matter of common prudence to consult him before any undertaking of more than trifling importance.

Science and Religion

Vedic religion was regulated with a view to ensuring the favorable course of natural phenomena—*rita*, the "cosmic

norm." In the very earliest texts there is a complete list of the constellations that lie in the apparent path of the moon and sun, and that serve as points of reference from which to plot the movements of the other heavenly bodies; a little later, the science called *Jyotisha* gives a fairly precise calculation of the sidereal year and detects a quinquennial cycle. Vedic ritual did in fact necessitate exact astronomical knowledge, just as the construction of altars and hearths led to geometrical discoveries and formulations, which, like the astronomical knowledge, were recorded in Treatises of Vedic date. Medicine, in classical India, is founded on theories of vital energy that are already mentioned or implied in the Veda: the physical and physiological norm was the counterpart of the cosmological. In addition, ritual and, above all, magic, based their validity on certain anatomical and therapeutic data.

Side by side with alchemy (practiced with a view to preparing substances with miraculous properties, elixirs of immortality or youth, but also making use of semi-scientific procedures), there exists a chemistry the aim of which was the preparation of remedies with mineral bases. Its technique consists of calcination and heating in closed vessels, the object being to extract metallic ingredients, purify them, and then re-unite them in new combinations.

But what is of interest here is the fact that alchemy or, as it should perhaps be called, chemistry with alchemistic tendencies, is sometimes associated with Yogic practices and applied to the task of leading man toward deliverance, just as if it had been an exclusively mystical discipline. Thus there is a Shivaite school of alchemy in the fourteenth century, its

tenets being summarized in the writings of Madhava; mercury, known as the "prince of juices" and "that-which-conducts-the-soul-to-the-other-world," provides the Yogic apprentice with a guarantee of long life and allows him to become supernaturally pure, so as to obtain a "celestial body" that will be the support of the state to which he aspires, that of being "delivered during life" (p. 74).[3]

Private Rites

As we have noted, India was conservative in the matter of private rites; the authority of the "Domestic Aphorisms" continued unabated. *Samdhya*, the rite of "junction" (of day and night), replacing the former solemn rite of *Agnihotra* (p. 15), is made up of an external ablution (with invocation to the waters), an internal ablution (mouth-rinsing, *acamana*), followed by sprinkling water on the head; next comes a silent recitation of the *gayatri*, the famous formula from the Rig-Veda:

> May we attain that excellent glory of Savitri the god:
> So may he stimulate our prayers.[4]

[3] The concept of the "celestial body" or "diamond body" will be familiar to readers of Richard Wilhelm and C. G. Jung, *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (New York, Wehman), which it is permissible to quote here despite the fact that it deals not with Indian but with Chinese esotericism.—Tr.

[4] The translation used here is from *The Rig-Veda and Vedic Religion*, by A. C. Clayton, who adds: "This verse was, in its original use, a simple invocation of the sun to shed a benign influence upon the customary offices of worship. But it came to be looked on as an omnipotent religious formula, sure to secure salvation from the round of births to the man who understands its inner meaning. In later Hinduism it is constantly extolled."—Tr.

after which the sun is adored as it climbs above the horizon; finally the *gayatri* is repeated, the mouth is rinsed again, different parts of the body are touched, *pranayama* (p. 69) is practiced for a short time, various formulae are pronounced, and summary offerings are made. A similar procedure is followed in the evening and, though more briefly, at midday.

The daily "five great offerings" (*maha-yajna*) are: (a) *vaishvadeva*, offered to "All-the-gods," an oblation to the fire just before the midday meal and consisting of food taken from that meal; (b) *bali*, a cursory offering made to "all beings"; (c) *pitriyajna* or *tarpana*, a libation of water mixed with sesame to the shades of the dead; (d) *atithi*, a rite of hospitality to visitors, especially ascetics; (e) *brahmayajna*, recitation of a passage from the Veda. These little ceremonies have been simplified or even partially dropped in modern times. But others are also used, such as the worship of the five protecting deities (*pancayatana*), Vishnu, Shiva, Surya, Parvati, and Ganesha, who are represented by figurines or stones and receive daily offerings in the home. There are agricultural rites; guild rites (in which offerings were made to the characteristic tool of the guild's trade); there is enormous variety of detail from place to place and epoch to epoch. Some rites celebrated by priests in Vedic times are later brought into the domestic scheme, such as the ancient sacrifice at full moon and new moon. The center of religious life is not so much the temple as the home fire, which is kept alight continuously from the marriage ceremony on.

As for the *samskaras*, or "sacraments," the chief of them are twelve in number. The "Impregnation" consecrates the supposed time of conception; the ceremony for the first con-

ception takes place four days after the wedding. Three months later comes the "Begetting of the son," the aim of which is to secure male progeny: the essential duty of every householder is to ensure the continuance of his line through sons and thereby also to ensure that tradition will be perpetuated and in particular that *shraddha* (p. 100) will be executed: "By a son," says Manu, "one conquers the worlds, by the son's son one obtains immortality, by the son's grandson one attains to the solar world: the son is called *put(t)ra* because he delivers (*tra-*) his father from hell, which is called *put.*"

Mention is also made of a prenuptial rite, in which the line of the parting is traced in the hair of the mother-to-be. The birth itself is of course the subject of an elaborate ceremony, the main features of which are the introduction of a pellet of honey and *ghi* into the newborn child's mouth by means of a golden spoon, and the dedication of the child to the protective goddess Shashthi. The "Name-giving" ceremony takes place on the tenth day, and the choice of the name is of course accompanied by a series of precautions: in addition to the personal name there is often a secret one and sometimes even an astrological one as well.

At four months there is the "First egress," which includes homage to the rising sun; at six months, solid food is solemnly ingested for the first time. "Hair-cutting" takes place at three years, "Tonsure" (in which a single lock is left intact) at four, "Piercing the ears" some time later. More important than these is "Initiation" (*upanayama*), which marks the child's entry into the Brahmanic community and gives him the title of *dvija*, "twice-born"; it is regarded as a second birth. The

age at which it takes place varies according to caste but is always between eight and twelve years. The sacred cord, made of three threads of white cotton knotted together, is put on; in ancient times the panel of a garment was used. The ceremony also marks the beginning of study; the father chooses a teacher, or *guru*; the latter, having washed the cord and twisted and untwisted it, uttering a special sacred recitation meanwhile, passes it round the young initiate's right arm and over his head so that the end lies on the left shoulder. The period of religious studies has been considerably shortened nowadays, with the result that the "Homecoming" rite, which used to be performed when the student left the *guru* to regain the paternal roof, has become little more than a formality.

But in contrast to this, wedding ceremonies have remained long and elaborate; though the religious aspect of them, the only one that interests us here and the one, moreover, that has altered the least, consists of a small number of distinctive practices. The date is fixed after careful astrological calculation; the fiancé is conducted by messengers to the home of his future parents-in-law and is received as an honored guest; he anoints the girl and presents her with a new garment and a looking glass; and she is solemnly given to him by her father. She thereupon throws offerings of roasted grain onto the fire, cupping her hands together to do so. An episode known as the "seven steps" solemnizes the irrevocability of the union, and the hands or clothes of the pair are fastened together. A procession forms and conducts the young woman to her new home; the home fire is transported at the same time. She enters the house without

touching the threshold and sits down on a red ox-hide. The couple consume votive food or else anoint one another. The wedding is followed by a period of three days of sexual abstinence, the outward symbol of which is a stick placed on their bed. Many other rites (propitiations and expiations) are performed, the whole constituting a synopsis of Hindu religious observance; in one part of it we can recognize, masked by a symbolism of magical character, a form of marriage contract containing vestiges of primitive abduction by violence.[5]

The normal funeral method is cremation, burial being reserved for children, ascetics, and the members of certain sects. The cortege accompanying the deceased (whose body is anointed and dressed in fine new clothes) is preceded by torchbearers on its way to the place of cremation; its progress is accompanied by recitations from the scriptures and the keening of women paid for the purpose. Tools of the dead man's trade are placed with him on his pyre. In the ancient ritual it was the custom for his widow to lie down beside him, after which she was invited to get up again and be joined in wedlock with her brother-in-law (levirate marriage, *niyoga*); sometimes a cow was sacrificed. The ceremony is followed by rites of purification; after several days the bones are collected and placed in an earthenware jar, which is either buried or thrown into the river. A mound, *smashana*, may be erected if the deceased was a prominent personage. One necessary complement of the funeral offices

[5] A delightful account of present-day Hindu married life and the Hindu attitude toward sexual relations will be found in *Man's Presumptuous Brain*, by Albert T. W. Simeons (New York: Dutton, 1961).

is the *shraddha*, the rite "born-of-confidence," the purpose of which is to ensure that the deceased becomes a *pitar*, a benevolent shade. The *shraddha* consists of balls of rice, *pindas*, which are set on the ground with water beside them, for the sustenance of the dead man; the ceremony is watched by three Brahmans who represent his ancestors in the direct line and are honored and entertained with the rest of the funeral guests. The *shraddha* is performed from ten to thirty days after death, or at the same time as certain of the temple solemnities, or at regular intervals, often in a simplified form; in principle at least it may be performed as often as once a month.

The Stages of Life

The theory of *ashramas*, or "states of existence, stages or modes of life," was crystallized in the late Vedic period; it doubtless proceeds from a formal systematization of what people actually did. The term means the three (or usually four) stages through which in principle a high-caste Indian passes: Brahmanic student, head of a household, anchorite, and finally "renunciant." The doctrine illustrates the contrast between two ideals, works and asceticism, a contrast expressed in a man's lifetime as a continuous evolution. It should moreover be remarked that in the past the transition from a social to a contemplative life did in fact frequently take place; even today there is no lack of people who after being deeply involved in worldly life suddenly abandon all in response to the call of the spirit.

The "Brahmanic student" stage hardly exists now, at

any rate in the exacting form known to antiquity; there are references to its having lasted sometimes as long as forty-eight years. The stage is characterized by study of the sacred texts and, even more, by the duties of obedience and service that the student assumes with regard to his *guru*; one of the essential moral obligations is chastity (*brahmacarya*, the word denoting that state, has taken on the meaning of "continence").

The duty of the "head of a household" is to beget sons (p. 97), to keep the domestic fires burning (as we have seen, they are also religious fires), and to perform the rites, particularly *shraddha* (p. 100). The anchorite lives in some secluded spot, with or without his family; his existence is of the type idealized in ancient Indian descriptions of "hermitages," as in the Sanskrit lyrical drama *Shaknntala*. It involves ascetic exercises but is not incompatible with a certain amount of worldly activity; it is a kind of retreat. The fourth and final stage is that in which the Indian abandons all worldly ties to take up the pilgrim's staff and the beggar's life, wandering from one holy place to another. "Sacrificing himself to the Self, loving the Self, playing with the Self, entrusting himself to the Self, he gives up every connection with the outer world and employs himself in causing the ritual fires to rise up in his own being, making henceforward only inner sacrifices and oblations" (*Maha-Bharata*). The third and fourth stages, especially the fourth, amount in fact to religious orders, the rule of the order differing according to the sect to which the adept belongs. *Samnyasins*, or "renunciants," are to be found to this day throughout India; they hold triennial conferences in the holy cities. A commoner form of devotion,

however, is that which consists in taking up one's abode, for a time only or for the rest of one's life, with some great master, in his *ashrama* (the modern sense of which word is a place of retreat organized on community lines.)

We must add that while all Hindu writings place a high value on renunciation, the opposition felt in Brahmanic society toward suicide committed on religious grounds is equally strong. References are nevertheless to be found here and there to suicide committed by ascetics, those who, as Manu says, "go forward resolutely on a straight path toward the northeast living on water and air, until the body is exhausted and they fall"; this is what is called the "great journey," and its destination, seldom attained, is the Himalayas. Expiatory suicide is something quite different, approved by ancient doctrine as the remedy for some grave misdeed that cannot be wiped out in any other way.

Monastic Orders

Hinduism did not beget monastic orders in ancient times to anything like the same extent as did Buddhism and Jainism; this difference is one of the distinguishing marks of Hinduism. Hindu religious communities remained scattered about the country and had no stable form of organization. Shankara, however, the great philosopher of the eighth and ninth centuries and the champion of "non-dualistic" Vedanta (p. 27), in whose scheme of things sectarianism finds no place, is credited with having founded a Shivaite order composed of ten brotherhoods, the members of which are called, eponymously, *dashanamis*, "those with ten names," and also

ekedandis, "those whose staff has but a single knot."[6] They were of course "renunciants." Women were admitted into the order. Several of these orders accepted Brahmans only; others were open to all four castes (and therefore excluded untouchables and those who had lost caste). Some orders made a practice of nudity, possibly in imitation of the Digambara Jains. Tradition has it that Shankara founded four[7] great monasteries: Shringeri (in Mysore), Govardhana (at Puri, in Orissa), Sharada (at Dvarka, in Kattiawar), and Joshi (at Badarinath, in the Himalayas). The head of Shringeri governs the whole and enjoys great authority even outside the milieu of the adepts; his title is "ruler of the world." The adepts of Ramananda, Madhva, and several others also founded monasteries. Vishnuite monks are often known as *Vairagins*, "the dispassionate"; except that the followers of Vallabha are *gosains* or *gosvamins*, "masters." Those of the Shrivaishnava school, who are of necessity Brahmans, have a triple staff or a staff with three knots in it as their distinctive sign; they are known as *tridandis*. The Shivaite communities are less closely organized, and individual asceticism is their keynote; but there are monasteries inhabited by the Lingayats, that are affiliated with five original foundations and the influence of which has been active in every village where members of the sect exist.

[6] These features are curiously reminiscent of Pythagoreanism, with its emphasis on the staff or rule, the numbers ten and four, and monism. The element in human affairs called "Pythagorean" is like an underground spring, which may emerge anywhere, at any time, under one name or another.—Tr.

[7] Cf. footnote 6.

Caste

Caste (*varna, jati*) is a phenomenon at once complex and widely distributed; it is something more than a purely religious question, and we are concerned with it here only insofar as it affects or is dominated by religion. Clearly, of the three great early social functions only the first, the Brahmanic, is essentially religious. The Brahmans, whatever their worldly avocations, are in the nature of their estate the guardians and dispensers of divine power: "The very birth of a Brahman is the eternal incarnation of the Law" (Manu). Their duty is summed in a single phrase, "to teach the Veda"; their way of life, according to the ancient prescriptions of the *Smriti* (p. 21), consists of offering sacrifices on other people's behalf (and therefore of being priests) and in receiving gifts. But the three other classes also partake, in their several degrees, in sacred functions. Every member of the second, the *kshatriyas*, whose proper vocation is that of arms, ought, according to the *Smriti*, to "sacrifice (on his own behalf), study the Veda, and give presents." The king, in whom the spirit of the *kshatriyas* is epitomized, is an emanation from godhead, a "god in human form" (Manu), so that even in post-Vedic India every important regal ceremony bears the stamp of a religious holiday; such feasts are the only surviving form of the ancient worship of the great Vedic deities. The third class, the *vaishyas*, who in principle at least are devoted to stock raising, agriculture, and commerce, have the same responsibilities in sacred matters as the *kshatriyas* but in a less onerous measure. The fourth class, the *shudras*, exist to serve the other three and are apparently excluded from any

religious status; but certain rights are conceded to them in texts of the Vedic period, and moreover the whole trend of many sects has been toward integrating or reintegrating them into the Brahmanic system.

As for the multitudes of "modern" castes, which in theory are offshoots of the four great categories, they are differentiated rather by profession (and also by habitat and ethnic ties) than by religious characteristics, which however did play some part in their emergence. Among the Brahmans, the only group to have kept its original outlines more or less intact, the majority have abandoned their priestly vocation without incurring any discredit. As early as the Laws of Manu we read, "The Brahmans should be honored even though they devote themselves to common occupations of every sort: for every single one of them is a great god"; this on condition, however, that the occupation chosen be not one of those classed as "impure." Religious investiture is common to all the "twice-born" (*dvija*), in other words all the first three castes. Expulsion from one's caste is a kind of excommunication, and most of the rules of caste are based on the idea of segregation, an idea deriving from religious values of purity and impurity. As for the origin of caste, some have conceived it as being exclusively of religious growth, but this assertion is only speculative.

Morality

Inasmuch as social and religious duties depend on castes and the stages of life, morality, to the extent that it derives from these duties, follows the same divisions; *dharma* (p. 33)

is not a universal *dharma* but one of "caste and stage of life." In addition, morality is subject to a subdivision that coincides only partly with the foregoing, namely that of the "three goals" of human activity, *dharma* (duty, religious or moral worth), *artha* (the pursuit of wealth), and *kama* (the quest for pleasure).

At the same time it would be a mistake to overlook the implicit presence of a general morality the lines of which emerge more or less clearly in the archaic values of ritual exactitude and purity. The old term *rita*, "cosmic order," became a synonym for truth, and its opposite, *anrita*, for falsehood. In the Epic and thereafter there is much moralizing to the effect that we must aspire to virtue even at the expense of worldly advantage; man's duty must be done. In our relations with other people, and even with animals, the prime virtue is non-violence, or *ahimsa* (a word occurring first in the *Chandogya-Upanishad* and destined to reverberate again and again in modern India); according to Manu the practice of non-violence permits a man to escape from the cycle of *karman*. Certain heroic values are also advocated; true greatness demands suffering on one another's behalf and even saving one's enemy's life. One of the heroes of Brahmanism is Prince Vipashcit, who, when he finds on going down into hell that his presence solaces the damned, offers to stay there. From the moral point of view the *Maha-Bharata* is a code of chivalrous virtue for the warrior, and court poetry and the *Ramayana* claim to present the model head of a family and the ideal prince.

It is by striking such notes as these that Indian poetry transcends religious divisions and endows the Indian sensibil-

ity with a broadly human resonance. Gnomic poetry, that typically Indian creation, celebrates all the "profane" virtues and is the medium in which the man of humble circumstances edifies those above him, as the hunter teaches the Brahman in an episode in the *Maha-Bharata* (III, 206). The moral virtues possess a divine power as a means of attaining deliverance (*Gita* XVI, 5); they are as potent as religious donations in this respect (*Chand. Up.* III, 17); and the corresponding vices condemn the individual to that "demoniacal" destiny that is the way of transmigration. In short, a holy life without any religious exercises and without any definite religious attachment can produce the same result as devotional or mystical practice. We are told over and over again that what counts is not outward piety or the caste in which your destiny has caused you to be born, but conduct. Buddhism has no monopoly in urging this.

Even on the religious plane, deliverance as conceived by the followers of Shankara is a state in which the individual can help the world: *nivritti*, the attitude of non-action, does not necessarily exclude the practice of a certain altruism.

6 / HINDU SECTS

General

We have described Hinduism so far as if it were a unity. We must now look both at its local and doctrinal fragmentation, that is to say the sects of which it is composed and its historical evolution.

Sectarian division has never come anywhere near affecting all Hindus. A good many sects are only tiny groups, and adherence to even the major ones has often been nominal rather than real. Still, sects are an important factor and have been responsible for most of the new developments to which classical Hinduism has been subject. Without sects there would have been a high degree of stasis, with decadence the probable result.

What is a sect? A movement founded by a personality, in some cases to effect a reform in the activities of an existing sect. The fact that the founders of the most ancient sects are

legendary characters does not diminish this necessity for an individual "creation." Generally speaking, the object of such a creation is to combat abuses and make a return to pristine and unadulterated forms of worship, which are to be restored either because they belong to an authentic tradition or, on the contrary, because a need is felt for progress. Despite endless variations in detail, these initiators are connected by many similarities, not only in their personal careers but in the new communities they set up either by themselves or posthumously, through their first disciples: lay communities in some cases, but more usually containing a monastic element or a group of "renunciants." Reciprocal influence and even direct imitation have often played a part in the growth of sects, especially in recent times. The hallmarks of a sect are its attachment to its own scriptures, whether newly composed or chosen from the traditional ones; adherence to a special (sometimes rudimentary) form of cosmo-philosophical thought; its own ethics; and its own ways of representing the divine. And it has its own accessories, its external signs—such are the U-shaped mark on the forehead in Vishnuite movements, and the three horizontal lines used in Shivaism.

These two groups, Vishnuite and Shivaite, account for the majority of the sects; another large group, the *shaktas* (p. 114) may be regarded as a special development of the second. The remaining sects are a scattered phenomenon and, in the ultimate analysis, may be ignored; some of them were not without importance in the past, in their own parts of the country, but have since become insignificant. The only exception is the Smartas, or "upholders of the *Smriti*" (the memorized tradition). But the word *Smarta* denotes not so

much a sect as the whole body of orthodox Hindus, those who keep up the Vedic domestic ritual and are regarded as adherents of Shankara insofar as he represents all non-sectarian forms of Vedanta (p. 27). In fact, the Smartas practice a *puja* that is thoroughly orthodox, the *pancayatana* (p. 96); and while some of them worship Shiva, others venerate the Trimurti. They are eclectics rather than traditionalists.

Intersectarian conflict is unusual, and when it does take place is fired by social rather than religious motives. At any rate, within the confines of Hinduism religious matters are governed by a spirit of toleration.

Origins

The earliest sects the history of which can be traced at all precisely are those of the twelfth century; which is to say that we come on these movements at a time when, as we have seen, the beliefs on which they rested had long ago attained their definitive form. The names of the sects appear, however, in a much remoter past: in the period of the Epic there are mentions of the Pashupatas (Shivaites) and, more frequently, of the Bhagavatas and Pancaratras (Vishnuites). It is hardly likely that these terms merely denote amorphous masses of beliefs and believers, especially since, for example, we find the Pancaratras' doctrine supported (in the *Narayaniya*, an epic episode) by a special theology closely matching that of later sectarian treatises. All the same there is for a long time no description of a sect properly so called and no allusion to a schism of any kind. The ancient example of Mahavira and Buddha, who founded "heretical" religions totally separate

from Hinduism, does not appear to have been imitated in the succeeding fifteen hundred years. On the other hand, there probably existed from very early times a diffuse, unorganized Shivaism and Vishnuism, in the light of which various scattered evidence in the first millennium of our era must no doubt be interpreted.

Shivaite Sects

It is this diffuse Shivaism that serves more or less as a state religion under most Indian dynasties, at least from the seventh century; literati of every sort also claim it for their own, no doubt partly because Shiva happens to be the natural patron of literary undertakings. Shivaite ritual and the various other external practices are fairly thoroughly worked out. The philosophical doctrines (which exist only in certain sects) emphasize the theory of the individual's identity with the Supreme Being; hence the tendency, so often found in Shivaism, toward Tantrism and Yoga, whereas on the other hand the phenomenon of *bhakti*, except in isolated individuals, seems to have permeated the Shiva sects only at a late period, perhaps through Vishnuite influence.

The Kapalikas (named after Shiva *kapalin*, Shiva "who wears human skulls") are mentioned for the first time in literature about the sixth century; they are less a sect than a species of extreme ascetics who are more or less despised for the grossness of their practices; their tradition seems to have been continued by the Aghoris or Aghorapanthis, who can still be found today and are said to have partially refined their ways under the influence of Kabir. The Gorakhnathis

(or Kanphatayogis, "yogis with cleft ears") are on a higher level; their movement, which has a slight philosophical tendency and is subdivided into numerous minor sects, really amounts to a school of yoga (*Hathayoga*); it has a considerable literature and still exists in various localities in northern India.

The Pashupatas, or "adepts of Shiva *pashupati*" are mentioned in ninth-century inscriptions but disappear about the fourteenth century; they seem to have been identical with the Lakulishas, so named after Lakulin, a master of Yoga who is supposed to have been their founder. In addition to normal Yogic practices for attaining to mystical ecstasy they make use of frenzied and fantastic practices, dancing, laughter, and so on. Nevertheless they did produce the outlines of a philosophical doctrine, based on a dualism between souls, or *pashus* ("beasts," literally) and the master (*pati*) or Shiva, whose body is "made of energy."

The other Shiva sects look directly or indirectly toward the Agamas as their scriptural canon, and their doctrine and ritual are like those of Tantrism. The soul is regarded as being fettered by the "triple bond" or affected by the "triple defilement" (ignorance, *karman*, and *maya*); it attains deliverance through the Master's grace. The Agamas are the basis of the *Shaivasiddhanta*, "corpus of Shivaite doctrine," an enormous philosophical collection authenticated most prominently in its thirteenth-century Tamil version; it postulates the eternal existence of three great principles, the Master (Shiva), the "bond" (matter, *pasha*), and the soul. Shiva creates and rules the world through the intermediary of "energy," *shakti*. Though we are well acquainted with the doctrines of the

movement (which are a compromise between Vedanta and Sankhya), we know very little about its organization. Texts have been discovered in the Malay Archipelago that go back to a *Siddhanta*, or "corpus of doctrine," in Sanskrit; this latter seems to have been the intermediate stage leading from the ancient Agamas to the Tamil *Siddhanta*.

Kashmiri Shivaism, also known as Trika, the "triple [doctrinal]" system, seems to have begun as a reaction against the dualism (which is more apparent than real, however) of the Agamas. Its carefully elaborated philosophy is based on a pure non-dualism that is at once realistic and idealistic; Absolute Being (represented as Shiva) is pure intelligence (*caitanya*) or pure "vibration" (*spanda*, the principle of movement). The world springs from an objectification of Shiva's thought and is produced by the combination of thirty-six elements (*tattva*). The path to deliverance is "recognition": the soul recaptures its awareness of its true nature, a nature that had been hidden from it by *maya*, "illusion." Tantric and Buddhist influences are discernible here and there. But we know nothing about the forms of worship and the community habits adopted. The movement seems to have been purely philosophical.

Lastly, the Virashaivas, "heroic Shivaites," also known as Lingayats, or "wearers of the *linga*", appeared about the twelfth century on the southern marches of Mahratta territory, their founder being a certain Basava (who was perhaps simply the reformer of an earlier movement). The sect is reputed to have lived in strict segregation, abandoning the Veda, images, the caste system, and various normal Hindu customs. On the social plane, it works for the emancipation

of women and thus, to this extent at least, occupies an extreme position in Indian religion; but it retains the sacraments and domestic rites and even practices a kind of baptism intended to provide the child with "eight breastplates" against sin. Its ritual is less conservative than its theology, a non-dualism "qualified by *shakti*" in which both matter and the soul are realities manifested by means of *shakti*. Deliverance is obtained in six steps, through the faith and love that the adept entertains toward Shiva. The sect is ruled over by wandering monks known as *jangamas*, or "*lingas* in movement"; starting from the five original monasteries it spread to various parts of the surrounding country. It has a fairly plentiful literature: learned texts in Sanskrit and popular texts (notably *vacanas*, or "sermons," some of which are attributed to Basava himself) in Kannari,[1] with a few in Tamil. Among the curious practices of the sect is the wearing of a *linga* in a case slung from the neck, whence the name Lingayats by which its adherents were known.

The Shaktas

Both when it appears independently and when it is found in combination with the worship of Shiva, the cult of the goddess Durga, and similar cults, can be loosely classified as part of Shivaism. The basis of Durga's cult is belief in *shakti* (whence the name shaktism given to sects of this kind, and *shaktas*, to their adherents); *shakti*, divine energy, exists as an emanation from every major deity and particularly from Shiva, and comes to hold such a place in the minds of its devotees as in many cases to displace the male god and turn

[1] Kannari is the language spoken in Mysore.—Tr.

him into a shadowy figure in the background.[2] This belief is an ancient one, the first traces of it being discoverable in the Veda, and it made its way into various forms of worship that are not specifically of the *shakta* persuasion. Moreover, *shakta* ritual merged with Tantric ritual to such an extent that it has sometimes been questioned whether shaktism and Tantrism are not synonymous. It can be stated, however, that there is a *shakta* cult, not Tantric or not necessarily Tantric, the earliest literary evidence concerning which is that supplied by the historian Bana in the seventh century. The important books for understanding it are the *Devi-Bhagavata* (*-Purana*), written before the fifteenth century, and the *Candi-Mahatmya*. Animal sacrifice (originally, in ancient times, human sacrifice) played a great part in it, and its sects flourish particularly in Bengal; it was Shaktism that brought about the decline of Bengali Vishnuism. There is also a recent literature of *shakta* type—consisting of adoration of the Divine Mother—that strikes a note of devout emotion such as one sees in Krishnaism. But these lyrical outpourings are such as might equally well be classed with the many glorifications of the Goddess that have found literary expression throughout India, at all periods. The *shakta* literature, mostly Sanskrit, is extensive.

Vishnuite Sects

The Bhagavatas, or "lovers of the Blessed One," must have been, in ancient times, ordinary Vishnuites; nevertheless the term does designate here and there a special type of Vish-

[2] That is to say, worship was directed not toward Shiva but toward his *shakti*, Durga.—Tr.

nuite, those who place emphasis on fervent devotional love. On the literary plane, at the close of the thirteenth century and later, the spiritual descendants of this type appear in the persons of the *bhaktas* of the Mahratta region, who sing "glorifications," or *abhangs*, a kind of sermon chanted in the name of the god Vitthal or Vithoba and his wives. These Marathi *bhaktas* are still to be met with today; their piety is a syncretism mingled with popular traditions, while their rallying point in the ancient scriptures is the *Bhagavata-Purana*, to which they are closely devoted. They are not grouped in sects properly so-called but rather in loosely organized fraternities, the ranks of which include a number of paid singers, the Haridasis. In other parts of India *bhaktis* often belong to definite sects.

It is difficult to establish the historical link between the Bhagavatas and the Pancaratras (a name the meaning of which is uncertain). It would seem that the latter became at an early period the guardians of the real canon of Vishnuism, the texts known comprehensively as the Samhitas (p. 25). The literature inspired by the Samhitas which is thought to have originated in northern India and may go back to the seventh century, formulates the characteristic theology, ritual, and organization of Vishnuism. It postulates a personal "supreme *Brahman*," at once immanent and transcendent, symbolized by Vishnu, Vasudeva, or Narayana; the universe is conceived as the product of a *shakti*, or "energy" inherent in this supreme principle. The cosmogonic picture is highly developed, with its theory of the *vyuhas*, or "unfoldings" (p. 44) issuing from the "qualities" of *brahman* and engendering a series of successive "creations." The doctrine on deliverance

presents a good deal of variety. A candidate for membership in the sect undergoes an initiation ceremony in five phases.

Although Pancaratrism is little more than a corpus of doctrine, the movements deriving from it are of a markedly sectarian character. The *shrivaishnava* movement ("attachment to Vishnu and his spouse Shri"), which established itself in Tamil-speaking regions, is the natural continuation of it, just as the *Shaivasiddhanta* (p. 112) was of the Shivaite Agamas. The original leaders of the movement are the Alvars; these men first gave Vishnuite devotional faith and love their characteristic expression and provided the movement with its hymns and narratives in a popular vein. But the movement, which may have started in the ninth century, does not attain its full individuality until the appearance of Ramanuja. Ramanuja, the first great name in philosophical Vishnuism, was born in the vicinity of Madras in the eleventh century and established a form of Vedanta based on the notion of a "qualified *brahman*," that is to say a personal God equipped with attributes, the all-embracing principle of souls and things. Ramanuja fosters a species of devotion the tendency of which remains partly intellectual, and introduces the notion of *prapatti* (p. 72). His work marks the beginning of the connection between Vedanta and sectarian religion, as a reaction against Shankara. The Shrivaishnavas adore only one deity, Vishnu, and have a strict code of rules relating to food and caste; their leaders are always Brahmans. The movement has always flourished most in the south. After Ramanuja's death it makes a partial return to the values of normal Hinduism, following which a kind of schism arises: the conservative northern school is opposed by the southern, which

takes up a radical position on the question of divine grace. The first is characterized by "the monkey's way": personal effort is regarded as effective, like the action of the baby monkey, which, when danger threatens, clings to its mother and is thus saved. The second follows "the cat's way": the she-cat takes her kittens by the scruff of the neck and saves them without any effort on their own part. There are still many Ramanujas (sectaries of Ramanuja) in Tamil-speaking areas today; and the literature, partly Sanskrit and partly Tamil, is extensive.

With the Ramanandis a wind of reform blows through Vishnuism. The head of the sect, Ramananda (fifteenth century?), originally a Shrivaishnava, relaxes the rules concerning food and caste, causes the religious status of Sanskrit to recede and that of vernacular languages to advance, sets in motion a fairly sweeping democratic tendency, and in addition founds the *vairagins*, a monastic order with a comparatively undemanding rule. Ramananda does not concern himself much with philosophy and theology, simply retaining the main *Shrivaishnava* tenets. What is novel about his movement is that it is the first in Indian history to be definitely based on Rama as the supreme deity.

From the Ramanandis there spring more or less directly, in the fifteenth century and later, various new sects, some of which take on the character of reformed movements, emphasizing social or ethical responsibilities and retaining only the elementary features of Hinduism. The most prominent of these sects is that of the Kabirpanthis (sixteenth century), who, however, made a gradual return to common practice after having abandoned it for a while under the influence of their leader Kabir, who preached general reconciliation

between castes and between sects on a basis of abstract (non-figurative) monotheism. Kabir, in whom some have detected the influence of Sufism, and whom indeed the Moslems claim as their own, uttered his eclectic teaching in moralizing strophes that constitute the canon of the sect.

The Sikhs, who are considered to lie beyond the boundaries of Hinduism, imprecise though these are, derive in part from Kabir. Nevertheless the Sikh movement, founded by Nanak (1469-1538), a Punjabi from the region of Lahore, retains some of the domestic rites, cultivates the pantheism of Vedanta, devotional faith, and love, and the institution of the *guru*, or "spiritual master," which indeed it carries to extremes. The literature, composed mainly of hymns, shows the influence both of Kabir and of Mohammedan rigor. The first nine masters after Nanak's death complete the sect's hymnal and arrange it so as to form what is known as the "Noble Book" (*Granth*), a large collection in the Hindi language (with passages in Punjabi), augmented by the addition of liturgical compositions and miscellaneous items. This is the Sikh canon. But the originality of the movement lies less in its religious aspects than in its political orientation, the effect of which has been to set up a theocratic and military ruling caste, the Khalsa; normal Hindu practice is replaced by the cult of the Holy Book and the sword, perpetual holy war is declared on the Moslems, and a species of initiatory baptism is established. This change is largely the work of the tenth *guru*, Govind (1675-1708); a later leader, Banda (d. 1716), nearly caused a schism by his extremist attitude, but in the event the threatened split merely caused the formation of a number of miniature sects within the whole. From the eighteenth century on the Sikh movement is of more concern to

political than religious history. In this movement as in others Hindu customs effect their return and idols reappear in private houses; but public worship, in the Gurudvaras, or "Gates of the *Guru,*" remains purely sectarian. A council exists to decide problems both spiritual and temporal.

The sect still flourishes in the present-day Punjab. It suffered severe blows in the riots that took place in 1947 on the separation of Pakistan from India: the holy city of the Sikhs, Amritsar, with its "Golden Temple," was badly damaged and the Sikh community was scattered over vast tracts of Hindu territory.

The Vishnuite sects that remain to be considered, while having devotional faith and love as their common factor, like some of those already described, are perhaps descended from the ancient Bhagavatas. Doctrinally, each develops its own interpretation of Vedanta. The earliest of them is the Madhvas, founded by Madhva, alias Anandatirtha (thirteenth century), a theologian of the Kannara region. It teaches that deliverance is attained by an immediate intuition of the Godhead. Philosophically the movement is fairly close to Ramanuja, but more eclectic; one notices particularly its belief (rare in India) in an everlasting hell and a paradise consisting exclusively of sensual pleasures. The philosophical position maintained is a thoroughgoing dualism, with the omnipresent Vishnu on the one hand confronting souls and matter on the other. The Madhva ascetics resemble those of the Shankaryan orders. The literature, especially the Sanskrit literature, is of considerable importance. The doctrine is still current today in the south, among the intellectual classes rather than the lower social strata.

The Vishnusvamins, founded in the south by the teacher

of that name, possibly as early as the thirteenth century, are rather similar to the Madhvas, but it so happened that the sect was absorbed fairly early by the Vallabhas or Vallabhacaryas, founded by a fifteenth-century Telugu theologian named Vallabha. On the philosophical plane Vallabha represents a return to "pure" non-dualism, in which the world issues from an internal transformation of the Absolute. Vallabha elaborates a theory of devotional faith and love. postulating a twofold path to deliverance: the so-called "frontier path," which requires personal effort, and another path known as "flowering," which depends entirely on divine grace. The god worshiped is Krishhna, and the adorations addressed to him are addressed equally to the *guru* or spiritual head of the sect, who is identified with Krishna the herdsman-god and holds his office by hereditary right descending in the male line from the founder. This state of affairs has led in comparatively recent times (eighteenth century) to abuses and even to sexual scandals, which have prevented the sect from growing in numbers.

Such has not been the case with the Nimbarkas or Nimanandis, who claim as their founding father another Vedantist teacher, Nimbarka (almost certainly of the thirteenth century), a proponent of "dualism-non-dualism," or, as another expression has it, "difference without difference"; Nimbarka seeks to establish a co-ordination between the Absolute, which is one, and things, which are many. Ultimately the doctrine derives from Bhaskara (ninth-tenth century). In organization and religious practice the Nimbarkas are akin to the post-Ramanuja Shrivaishnavas. There are numbers of them still to be found in the region of Mathura (the country of Krishna) and several other localities.

The greatest name in medieval Vishnuism is the Bengali Caitanya (1485-1533), an example of the apostle and seer who exerts an influence by his personal presence and his faith rather than his writings, which in the present case are few and simple. The organization of his sect is the work of his direct disciples, notably six teachers (the *gosvamins*) with a huge literary output in Sanskrit, embracing every aspect of their beliefs. The cult of Krishna, combined with that of Radha (p. 51), figures here in all its splendor, and Caitanya himself is deified after his death and identified with Krishna. The *gosvamins'* descendants are the heads of monasteries and the chief priests of temples. The ritual includes a chanted "glorification" in Bengali or Hindi and a number of practices that represent the peak of Vishnuite achievement in the invention of material forms of worship. The heart of the system is devotional faith and love, which often rises to a paroxysmal pitch; its cosmogonic frame of reference is provided by *shakti*, and it is inspired by literary antecedents. Bengal has always been the most fertile field for the growth of "Caitanyism," which seems to have been gradually permeated by the influence of the non-sectarian Vedanta of Shankara. There was a revival in the nineteenth century. Earlier, the activities of Caitanya's disciples brought to birth a kind of sublimated Tantrism represented by the Sahajiyas,[3] who find the essence of religion in divine love realized in the form of Platonic love for an inaccessible woman. Here also, abuses occurred in practices.

[3] See A. K. Coomaraswamy's essay on Sahaja, in *The Dance of Shiva.*—TR.

7 / A SKETCH OF HINDU HISTORY

In the Beginning

The origins of Hinduism are lost in the mists of time; such, at least, is the case if one sets out to find them in those scattered elements of belief that, in the Vedic texts and the evidence of an age-old religious folklore, can be identified as perhaps constituting the earliest Hinduism. On the literary level it would be useless to go back further than the first great texts subsequent to the Vedic period, namely the oldest of the post-Vedic Upanishads, the Great Epic, and the first *Smritis* (p. 21 *et seq.*); and one must always remember that the date at which a text was composed (and which, moreover, was usually not known in ancient times) is of no help in drawing an inference about the date at which the materials it contains were elaborated.

The canonical literature of Buddhism and that of Jainism, both of which were compiled in the last few centuries

before Christ, allude frequently to the nature of Brahmanic society but give us very little information on the stuff of the religion to which they are opposed. We can follow the arguments conducted among sophists and theologians, similar to the controversies that figure in the most ancient of the Upanishads, but for the most part these sophists are heretics or extremists rather than orthodox Hindus; the most remarkable of them are the Ajivikas, who were founded by a certain Goshala, son of Mankhali, and who are considered to have carried the theory of *karman* (of which they were conceivably the initiators) to an extreme, in that they denied free will and responsibility. The Buddhist sermons heap sarcasms on caste privileges and the Brahmans' inordinate pride, but they hardly ever attack the fundamentals of belief; at the most we find Buddha, in the *Tevijja-Sutta*, rejecting the union of the soul with Brahman (masculine) on the grounds that Brahman is unknowable, but this objection is one that could well have sprung from the most orthodox quarters. It is obvious that the forms of religious life in primitive Buddhism and Jainism can be explained only in terms of a long-standing familiarity with Brahmanic India; even if they did not directly borrow from Brahmanism, these two new religions were drawing on the same common fund of Indian character and ethos as their rival.

We do know at least that Brahmanic society, with its castes, its ways of life, its popular polytheism, was firmly established by the time these two canons were drawn up. Nevertheless, if Hinduism managed to get the support of the smaller principalities, the great dynasties, the first to emerge in definitely historical times, leaned rather toward Buddhism.

Such was notably the case with the Maurya dynasty (fourth-second century B.C.), the greatest representative of which, the third in the line, Asoka (r. 273-232), underwent a spectacular conversion to Buddhism and ordered inscriptions to be set up in the chief provinces of his empire, instructing his peoples in the ethical principles of the Buddha: abstention from violence, obedience, respect, charity, a life of virtue. Asoka stigmatized domestic rites as empty and pointless and attacked blood sacrifices even more strongly, but at the same time proclaimed himself the protector of all sects. It is possible that the Shungas, who succeeded the Mauryas in 175 B.C., established or re-established Hinduism as the state religion; there are certainly references to two horse sacrifices performed by the grandfather of Vasumitra to commemorate the defeat inflicted by this young prince on the Greeks (Yavanas) on the banks of the Sindhu. Yet the so-called Indo-Hellenic monarchy that established itself about this time in northwestern India (Gandhara, subsequently the Punjab and Sind) showed a decided sympathy toward Buddhism: King Menander (the Milinda referred to in Buddhist sources), who reigned approximately from 168 to 145, conferred on philosophical problems with the monk Nagasena and demanded to be supplied with reliquaries; Greco-Buddhist art, the influence of which was to be so profound in Central and Eastern Asia, originated in the courts of these rulers.

Another foreign dynasty, the Kushanas (first-third century), were also won over to Buddhism, at least during the reign of the most important of them, Kanishka (middle of the second century), who founded *stupas*, struck coins with

Buddha's effigy, and seems to have protected Buddhist communities; though we must make some allowance, here as elsewhere, for the hagiographic tendency to which Buddhist texts are inclined. We know from inscriptions that Vishnuism (possibly in its more sharply crystallized form, Krishnaism) took a firm hold from the second century on, notably in Central India and the Deccan; there is the curious inscription of the Greek Heliodorus, ambassador of the king of Taxila Antialkidas at that time, who declared himself a devout "Bhagavata" and had a column set up at Besnagar with the image of Garuda, in honor of the "god of gods," Vasudeva. As for Shivaism the first dated evidence belongs to the first century of our era; two of the Kushana kings, Kadphises II and Vasudeva, seem to have patronized it. The same period saw the beginning of the great Hindu expansion into Southeast Asia (p. 39).

The advent of the Gupta dynasty in 320, the first great native dynasty after the Mauryas, brought the inception of what some authors have called the "Brahmanic Renaissance." The expression can be adopted if we take it to mean the rise of the great school of Brahmanic court poetry, and the rise of the theatre and of secular literature in general, and also the appearance of the first great works of non-Buddhist art. But the term would be misleading if it conveyed that the preceding periods witnessed an eclipse of Hinduism. What stands out is that Hinduism was now being patronized by a major monarchy; the first Guptas bore the title of *paramabhagavatas*, "great worshipers of the Lord," and proclaimed their adherence to the cult of Vishnu, an example subsequently followed by the Calukya dynasty of Vatapi (sixth cen-

tury); in the Deccan the Badami bas-reliefs attest the popularity of *bhagavata* Vishnuism during the same period. On the other hand the inscriptions, and literary works too, constantly refer to Shivaite "masters" (also called *pashupatas*), and from the sixth century on it seems that Shivaism replaced Vishnuism in the favor of the imperial administration. The impression given by the Gupta period is one of broad official tolerance, extending to Buddhism and Jainism as well as to the various sects within Hinduism. After the Guptas this tolerance was continued by the eclecticism in religious matters of King Harsha, in the seventh century, who has been called the Akbar of the Hindu period. The Guptas reinstated the Vedic rites; if on one hand these practically died out in the north (at least as regards the most solemn of them, the horse sacrifice), in southern India on the other hand, which has always been more tradition-minded, there was a succession of dynasties that made it their pride to see these brilliant and expensive ceremonies carried out. The invasions of the Hepthalites (Huns), from 475 to 534, fell with deadly effect on Buddhism, killing or scattering its monastic communities, but had no lasting effect on the development of Hinduism; their leader Mihirakula, at the beginning of the sixth century, declared his conversion to Shivaism, as did also his successful adversary Yashodarman of Mandasor, and, a little later, Shashanka, king of the Gauda region, with whom the emperor Harsha engaged in hostilities.

The development of the orthodox systems, the first beginnings of which must certainly be earlier than the Gupta dynasty, provided the necessary philosophical weapon for establishing and justifying Brahmanic thought and coun-

tering the critical offensive of Buddhism. The beginnings of Tantrism can be attributed to the sixth or seventh century; this movement, no doubt after a long period of latency, then started gaining acceptance both through its own literary manifestation and by the changes its impact brought about in foreign religious development.

What used to be called the Rajput period extended from the eighth to the twelfth century, and was dominated by a series of local monarchies springing from the *kshatriya* caste (p. 104). The decline of Buddhism, observed in central and southern India by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuan-Tsang in the middle of the seventh century, was accelerated in the south by the activity of the Tamil "saints," the Alvars and Nayanars, the decisive blow being struck by the great commentators on philosophical texts who follow one another in a stream from the eighth century on: Shankara, representing non-sectarian Vedanta; Kumarila (probably his contemporary), the great teacher of Mimamsa; in the tenth century, the logician Udayana; and, bridging the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the introducer of "sectarian" Vedanta, Ramanuja. There arose the first systems to establish a definitive union between philosophy and belief, these systems being the qualified non-dualism of the Shrivaishnavas among the Vishnuites, and the *Siddhanta* and Trika among the Shivaites. Moreover the number of sects began increasing from the eleventh century on, no doubt encouraged by the creation of monasteries and religious orders (especially among the Vishnuites), a creation initiated by the influence of Shankara in the ninth century. But the major departure was the spread of *bhakti*, which from then on started dominating most doctrines and forms of

thought. It is hardly possible to say just when and where it originated. Its diffusion went hand in hand with the considerable progress made by popular Vishnuism in northern India. At the same time the Rajput clans and the many royal houses, some long-lived, others ephemeral, that ruled the subcontinent during the whole of this period and that all adhered at least nominally to Hinduism, were more often Shivaite than Vishnuite; such at any rate was the case with the Colas of the southeast (tenth and eleventh centuries), to whom we owe several of the great Shivaite temples of southern India. We must note, finally, that the tolerant spirit obtaining under the Guptas and the emperor Harsha yielded to a fanaticism that broke out here and there into persecution; these outbreaks took place particularly in Dravidian areas, sometimes against the Buddhists, sometimes against the Jains, and were instigated by the Shrivaishnavas and, about the twelfth century, by the Lingayata, the latter being the more virulent.

The long period that follows, from the thirteenth century to our own day, does not fall conveniently into neat divisions from the standpoint of religious evolution. The establishment of the Turko-Afghan monarchy in Delhi in the fourteenth century, and that of the Great Moguls in 1526, brought about a prolonged contact between Hindus and Moslems, a symbiotic relationship that at times involved certain spiritual and cultural exchanges to the profit of both sides (pp. 35 ff.) but more frequently, as the whim of a sovereign might dictate, led to persecution: conversions were imposed by force, temples were destroyed. The reign of Firuz in the fourteenth century, and those of Sikandar and the Lodi dynasty toward

the end of the fifteenth, were the most baneful in this respect. Little by little a considerable number of Hindus, more than a quarter of the whole, were drawn either voluntarily or under compulsion into the paths of Islam, though on the social level they retained much of the *dharma* of Hinduism. A few provinces remained untouched by this revolutionary change, such as Mithila in the far north, and of course most of the southern provinces, where the Moslem element penetrated little or not at all. Under the Moguls, however, we must note as a happy exception the example of the emperor Akbar (sixteenth century), who substituted for the "reign of the burial ground" a broad-minded, tolerant administration; his attempt to realize "divine religion" bears witness to his preoccupation with the search for a synthesis of the two great rival faiths, a synthesis based on a mysticism rising superior to the barriers maintained in commonplace religious practice. Akbar conceded the same rights to Hindus as to Moslems and commissioned the translation of Sanskrit works; his great-grandson, the ill-fated Dara Shukoh, set on foot the translation of the Upanishads into Persian, thanks to which, a century and a half later, it became possible for Europeans to make contact with the philosophical thought of ancient India.

But the onward march of Islam in no way checked the literary growth of Hinduism; philosophical and religious commentaries abounded, and Vedanta, so rich in vitality, irradiated the Advaita (non-dualism) of Shankara with new and subtle distinctions and endlessly extended the range of his propositions. One after another the vernacular literatures of the south, and later those of the north, placed themselves at the service of Hindu thought, yet at the same time the produc-

tion of works in Sanskrit continued unabated. New sects continued to appear, especially in the Vishnuite sphere of influence; Vishnuism was characterized by a much sharper proselytizing spirit than Shivaism. The Ramaite sects made their appearance in the fifteenth century with Ramananda, and the Sikh religion (p. 119) is the distant descendant of Vishnuite types of devotion characterized by *bhakti*. It was these religious communities, large or small, that were responsible for almost every influential new trend in the literary field and even, in some degree, for the very shape and form of the various literate, cultivated languages of India, from one end of the country to the other.

If, during this long period, there were hardly any Hindu monarchies that made Shivaism or Hinduism into a state religion, as in preceding periods, at least the empire of Vijayanagar, in the heart of southern India, between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, displayed a general revival of Hindu ways, a revival from which religion also benefited. This empire's rulers had an eclectic, tolerant attitude; they protected non-Hindu sects of Indian origin, including Buddhist sects, which enjoyed a new lease of life in this region after having died out everywhere else. The sovereigns even extended their patronage to the small Islamic, Christian, and Jewish communities established in their realms.

From the eighteenth century on the traditional knowledge and wisdom tended to begin declining in importance in the majority of literate circles; the religious substratum of India started to be imperceptibly modified under the influence of Western techniques and, in the early nineteenth century, the creation of sects, in the old sense of the word,

came to an end, and several long-established sects declined or disappeared altogether. But just at this point a series of remarkable personalities began to emerge, new men who gave Hinduism a new accent and who, on a plane above that of popular belief, seemed to endow certain branches of Hindu philosophy with a destiny that, even today, lies beyond our power to foresee.

About these movements we must now say a word.

8 / CONTEMPORARY HINDUISM

General

When we think of contemporary Hinduism, we are thinking not so much of the beliefs and customs of the masses, which are much the same today as they were in the remote past, as of the emergence of certain remarkable individuals who represent Hinduism as observed and judged by the West, and who, in the eyes of many of the Hindus themselves, typify what is known as the Hindu Renaissance; that renewals of this kind have occurred before we have seen. Most of the individuals in question have left tangible traces of their lifework, in the form of a spiritual group; their work has been perpetuated by disciples and adherents. These groups are hardly comparable to the sects of past times, though they may seem to be; preoccupations that are spiritual and ethical in the proper sense of those terms, and, ultimately, social and national, play a much more important role than does the cult

or the organization of cults, like so many "churches." It is true that similar aspirations had been in evidence at least since the twelfth century, but henceforth a new perspective and new proportions begin to obtain. To this we must add the influence, whether avowed or not, of Christian sects and, more generally, of Western spirituality in some sense (accompanied on occasion by a leaning toward a romantic vision of society). Finally, the universalism of several of these movements makes a contrast with the narrower, more communal spirit of previous sects.

Ram Mohun Roy

Ram Mohun Roy, a Brahman born in Bengal in 1772, early acquired the idea of studying several great non-Indian religions; equipped with this knowledge, which was unusual in his day, he was well armed to fight idolatry and abuses, disseminating meanwhile, in a series of short publications that achieved wide distribution, liberal ideas on social, educational, and political questions. Well versed in the religious texts of ancient India, he published between 1815 and 1819 a "Primer of Vedanta" and English translations of several of the Upanishads. In 1814 he founded in Calcutta a "Spiritual Assembly" in which a modicum of pro-Christian tendencies was combined with Hinduism; and in 1828 he founded the "United Hindu Church," which soon acquired the title of *Brahmasamaj*, or "Society of Believers in Brahman," the most impressive feature of which was the sight of Hindus, Moslems, and Christians united in common prayer. This kind of devotional syncretism is sometimes referred to as Brahmoïsm. Ram Mohun Roy maintained his Hindu beliefs to the end,

however, and had to engage in lively polemics with the Christion missionaries, who were more alarmed by his "unitarian" attitude than they would have been by the most orthodox Hinduism. Nor was there any lack of criticism from his compatriots; worn out by controversy and by appeals to government, in some of which he was the plaintiff and in others the defendant, he moved to England in 1833 and died there in the same year. His purpose in visiting Europe was to meet Western religious leaders; on his way he spent some time in Paris and also in several French provincial cities.

The *Brahmasamaj* survived its founder, thanks to the zeal of Ram Mohun's personal friends, particularly Dvarkanath Tagore, grandfather of the poet. Dvarkanath's son, Debendranath, "the great rishi,"[1] soon afterward founded his own society, the *Tattvabodhini Sabha*, the aim of which was to re-establish monotheism on purely Hindu foundations. This society was amalgamated with the *Brahmasamaj* in 1842. The movement's general trend has been a gradual return on the part of its members to Hindu traditions, though it has never lost sight of its original aim. Its appeal is to an elite; it has made little or no headway among the masses; it has, however, acted as a stimulus to many Hindus to reflect on the postulates of their religion and to seek for these a more rational human basis.

Keshub Chander Sen

Keshub Chander Sen, born in 1838, the son of a Bengali physician, was initially a member of the *Brahmasamaj* but

[1] A Vedic word meaning "seer."—Tr.

took a radical attitude from the start, demanding, for instance, the abolition of the caste system, a remodeling of Hindu ritual, and the admission of women to the Society. The resulting tension led to a breakaway in 1864, when Keshub proposed the complete reform of Hindu marriage. He now set up an "Indian [or "progressive"] *Brahmasamaj*" (the former *Brahmasamaj* becoming in the natural course of events the *Adisamaj*, or "founding body"). This new society has cast out every vestige of Brahmanism, declares its faith in a single, nameless, and formless God, borrows its priests from various other religions, and has introduced some elements of Christian practice.

However, the reformer's authoritarian attitude and his connections with missionary circles gradually alienated the sympathies of even his best-tried supporters, and something like a scandal was caused by his announcing the marriage of his daughter, aged thirteen, to a maharaja's son, aged fifteen. A schism followed and in 1879, under the leadership of Ananda Mohun Bose, the *Sadharanasamaj*, or "Communal Society," was set up, drawing its inspiration from less intransigent principles and accentuating certain cosmopolitan tendencies. On his side, Keshub founded in 1871 the *Nava Vidhana*, or "New Dispensation Church," a true sect on the Christian model, of which he proclaimed himself at once the apostle and the pope. He died in 1884. Today the *Sadharanasamaj* is the only member of this group of bodies to have kept anything of its former importance, if not by the number of its adherents (who cannot be more than about ten thousand), then at least by their quality; Pandit Shivanath Shastri was their first missionary, and the last few years of the nine-

teenth century saw them engaged in fairly flourishing social and educational projects.

Mention can be made here of the *Prarthanasamaj* of Bombay (founded in 1874 by P. C. Mozoomdar), the most active member of which was the Bombay Chief Magistrate Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842–1901), a supporter of pure theism and a man whose moral stature makes him one of the noblest figures of the nineteenth century in India. Other remarkable personalities were R. G. Bhandarkar (1837–1925), a historian and scholar of the Mahratta state, and Gokhale, Randade's disciple (1863–1915).

Dayananda Sarasvati

A movement of quite a different kind, but the origins of which can be detected in the work of Ram Mohun Roy, is that associated with the name of a Kattiawar Brahman, Dayananda Sarasvati (1824–83), an ascetic of one of the Shankaryan orders. His most widely known book, the *Satyarthapracasha,* or "Illumination of the True Meaning," contains violent attacks against Hindu sects as well as against foreign religions. Dayananda's objective was to effect a return to the authentic Vedic tradition, that of the Hymns. Somewhat oddly he regarded that tradition as proving the truth of a thoroughgoing monotheism; what he was doing, without knowing it, was to recharge his monotheism with the content of the *Smriti.* Dayananda's movement, known as the *Aryasamaj* ("Aryan Society"), began in Bombay in 1875; it practiced a refined form of Hindu worship and combined nationalistic tendencies with fairly bold social activities inspired by a

democratic impulse. Its educational and social undertakings survive today: its schools are unprecedented, like the famous *Gurukula* of Hardwar, founded in 1902, at which an education in three stages was given in Hindi and Sanskrit, and which was a phalanstery, an *ashrama* of "Vedic" type. Dayananda's achievements were the result mainly of his gifts as an orator and man of action, gifts combined with the careful, inquiring temperament of a scholar (he left commentaries of enormous length on the Veda). The internal dissensions that arose after his death have not prevented his memory from remaining fresh among large numbers of the educated public in Hindi-speaking regions.

Ramakrishna

Very differently directed was the career of Ramakrishna, a poor Brahman's son, born in 1834 near Calcutta. He was above all else a saint, whose very simple teaching, rich in parables and sometimes underlined with a touch of humor, was well suited to reach the masses. He possessed in an unusually high degree the faculty of falling into ecstasy. His doctrine was no more than a popularization of the tenets of Shankaryan Vedanta; what was original about him was his insistence on acquainting himself with the mystical paths offered by other religions, especially Islam and Christianity. He underwent in consequence various experiences that confirmed him in his conviction of the need to create a mysticism on a higher plane than that of any single separate religion, a synthesis owing nothing to intellectual reflection and everything to inner realization. As for specifically Indian methods,

he penetrated very deeply into both Yoga and Tantrism; and in his personal faith and practice, despite being an ardent Vishnuite, he had a special preference for the cult and the image of the Divine Mother.

After his death in 1886 his closest disciple, Vivekananda, born in 1862, assumed the task of translating the Master's highly individual message into action. A persuasive speaker who gave of himself freely in his oratory, and with a temperament ideally suited to an active, outward-looking life, Vivekananda refashioned his own nature through his contact with the Master; he abandoned all his ties with the world and withdrew into the Himalayas for six years, after which he returned to active life and allied himself with the theosophist Subrahmanya Iyer, who in 1893 sent him to the Congress of Religions in Chicago. His eloquence, and the aura of fervor emanating from him, caused a sensation. Worn out by his own ardor he died prematurely, in 1902. It was Vivekananda, imbued with Western culture, who deliberately redirected the trend of Vedanta, turning it toward new values that united the highest spiritual aspirations of both East and West. He founded an "Order of Ramakrishna," composed of *swamis* or "masters," and, in 1897, the famous "Ramakrishna Mission," an organization that is attached to the Order and has undertaken various philanthropic social tasks in India; outside India, the Mission has sent *swamis* to various European, American, and Asian countries, to preach Shankaryan Vedanta in a form more or less adapted to the exigencies of modern philosophy and the varying demands of time and place. The Mission has been very active in the field of publications; it has also opened numerous schools or free monasteries in India,

including one at Almora (Mayavati) in the Himalayas that is entirely given up to contemplation. At its headquarters at Belur, near Calcutta, the Mission devotedly preserves the memory of Vivekananda, who died there. Among his earliest disciples we must at least find room to mention Miss Margaret Noble, who became Sister Nivedita and was the author of *The Master As I Knew Him.*

Ramana Maharshi and Aurobindo Ghose

There is no shortage of striking religious personalities in present-day India; perhaps the most remarkable are the least known: those who live in retreat and do not hold court in a circle of disciples. Ramana Maharshi, who died not long ago, lived at Tiruvannamalai, south of Madras; his vocation is said to have come to him as the result of an anguished apprehension of death, a critical experience that he underwent in 1891 and that he successfully surmounted. His object, briefly, was to achieve the realization of Vedanta by the ascetic path, restricting his activity to the power radiating from silence or, at most, from short conversations at long intervals with those about him. He also wrote, but very little.

Aurobindo Ghose (Sri Aurobindo, as his followers call him) was born in Calcutta in 1872. Like Vivekananda, he began his career in the service of political causes; it was only in 1908 that a sudden illumination caused him to quit the "path of action" and devote himself to spiritual realization, in his *ashram* at Pondicherry. He published, or allowed others to publish in book form on his behalf, a large number of studies, most of which had first appeared in the monthly review *Arya*,

which he founded in 1914—studies of the Vedas and Upanishads, of Yoga, the *Gita*, the Indian Renaissance, and so on; the most characteristic of these writings is the three-volume work entitled *The Life Divine*. He searched the traditions of ancient India (going back as far as the Vedic hymns, but relying on interpretations of doubtful philological correctness) for materials with which to build up a new conception of the religious personality, an ideal that would be universally valid. India's past, he asserted, furnished the key to humanity's progress; the new superman was not to be an *asura* like Nietzsche's (a semidemoniacal Titan) but an authentic divine being, possessing, thanks to Yoga, not only divine power but also love and, especially, wisdom. This was a transposition into a modern key of an old conception, the *jivan-mukta*, or "delivered-in-life," the *bodhisattva* of ancient India. Aurobindo died in 1950.

Other Leaders

While men such as these concerned themselves entirely with spiritual problems, others, such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920) remained faithful to their original mission, that of fashioning India's independence, the *Risorgimento* of political India. But Tilak, who has been justly called the father of Indian nationalism (and also of the "Indian Unrest" movement), also belongs to Hinduism in the strict sense of the word, in that he was the impassioned interpreter of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and that he put forward bold and brilliant theories (which however are quite impossible from the historical point of view) on the Veda, on the territories in-

habited by the Vedic Aryans, and on the chronology of the ancient texts. In just the same way, Gandhi's lifework can be explained as a function of the Indian tradition, that is to say, in the ultimate analysis, of spirituality: the password of non-violence, *satya-graha* ("grasp of truth"), and that ambiguity without disingenuousness which was characteristic of his political activities, both sprang from the ancient religious *Weltanschauung* of India. To him as to so many others the Upanishads and the *Gita* were, or rather became (for his early education had by no means steered him in that direction), his constant companions. His Hinduism was simple and straightforward and can be summed up as respect of the cow, in which he saw the cardinal element of *dharma.* He also used to say that if all the old texts disappeared and only the first verse of the *Isha Upanishad* were left ("All that moves on earth is filled with the Lord. Detach yourself from earthly things and you will find bliss. Covet no man's goods"), Hinduism would still survive forever.

The *Mahasabha,* or "Great College," which struggled for the liberation of India, wanted also (and at bottom these two endeavors were one and the same) to see an India as near to being completely Hindu as possible. One of the movement's founders, Pandit Malaviya, born in 1861, who was summoned in due course to preside over the Hindu University of Benares, took part in the Round Table Conference in London and brought with him a stock of Ganges water and Ganges mud so as to be able to maintain his ritual practices unbroken, and his ritual purity unimpaired, during his sojourn in a strange land.

Professors of philosophy, scholars of high caliber, such

as S. N. Das Gupta and Radhakrishnan, have tried in their turn, especially the latter, to deliver a universal message and build up an intersectarian faith, a faith based on their intimate acquaintance with ancient India, their atavistic feeling for the Hindu past. Finally, Tagore (1861–1941), poet, dramatist, storyteller, and essayist, searching for the principles on which to formulate a combined Eastern and Western humanism, quite naturally had recourse to that inimitably Indian nexus of thought that consists of reflections on the "individual soul" and its links with the Absolute, on immanent divinity, on the question of reincarnation, and so on. His work, though entirely secular by intention, is filled with religious feeling through and through; he sees in the *gayatri* (p. 95) the form of words through which it is possible to bring into human consciousness the fundamental unity of the universe, and to realize the unity of all lives in God.

Whatever our assessment of these men and their work, they are Indians; they are inside the tradition, they live it themselves as well as making it manifest by their example or their writings.

But there is another category of movements, which can be described most justly if one simply mentions and then ignores them: movements (and this includes some that have eventually emigrated to India) started by Westerners who claim to explain or reinterpret Hinduism, such as the different theosophical sects, the anthroposophists, traditionalists, and Western schools of Yoga. All that these people succeed for the most part in getting out of Hinduism is an artificial vocabulary and arbitrary interpretations chosen hap-

hazardly from the total field—the immense richness and complexity of which is clearly apparent even in this short book. Let us always remember that India is an Eldorado for charlatans. If Hinduism ever has a future as an integral part of a broad, generally acceptable spiritual movement beyond the borders of the country that gave it birth, this future will be created only by direct reflection from genuinely Indian forms of thought and spirit conceived and expressed by Indians.

APPENDIX

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

The following figures are those of the 1951 census in India and Pakistan, the 1961 figures not being at present available. Except where otherwise stated the figures refer to both India and Pakistan.

Religion	*Numbers*	*Distribution*
Hindus	303,186,000	India
	9,770,000	Pakistan
Sikhs	6,200,000	Amritsar (mostly), also in isolated parts of W. India
Moslems	25,400,000	India
	64,959,000	Pakistan
Buddhists	180,767	Apart from Ceylon, a few places in Nepal and Assam
Jains	1,618,000	Scattered over India, mostly in Gujrat and Bombay
Christians	8,157,000	Mostly in the south, at Goa, Madras, and Travancore
Jews	26,781	Mainly in Cochin
Others	1,800,000	

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